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LEARNING TO WALK IN TWO WORLDS: AN EXAMINATION OF SOUL IN MY PEDAGOGY

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by

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LEARNING TO WALK IN TWO WORLDS: AN EXAMINATION OF SOUL IN MY PEDAGOGY

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Who exactly is a teacher without soul? The answer is complex. First, this study will explore the concept of soul in education. There are varying cultural, religious and spiritual ways to examine soul. This inquiry does not seek to prove the existence of soul. Its existence is considered to be complex, and even abstract, but exists nonetheless. Soul is explored from a cross-cultural approach, which includes an emphasis on a Native American philosophical worldview and discourse. My approach involves teacher autobiography and auto-narrative to provide insights to teacher identity and the presence of soul in education. This project utilizes métissage to provide a portrait into my classroom teaching and life experiences. An additional supplemental section of influential scholars on my practice and theoretical underpinnings in education is provided.

The remaining chapters present the métissage themes for this project and present an analysis of my college classroom and teaching practices. This inquiry does not pretend to be able to "measure" soul; rather, this inquiry will interrogate the ways in which I bring soul forward into the classroom. There are four key lessons that emerged: (a). the indomitable and incredible tenacity of the human spirit. I encourage educators can use our stories to reflect and re-visit past experiences to inform our practice, grow our

understanding and honor the human spirit; (b). It is with sincerity and humility that I offer my narratives to others; (c). There are many layers to identity. The various life experiences that teacher educators go through are meaningful and can be useful when carefully integrated into teaching experience; and (d). Finally, our stories heal one another. The cathartic effect of searching our souls for strength, courage and hope can transcend our thinking into new ways of knowing, meaningful dialogues with others. I do not consider my stories as the only way to arrive at an understanding. Rather, all of our stories can afford us the opportunity to grow and learn from one another.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my family, relatives and all of my ancestors that came before me. I would be remiss to not acknowledge all of the voices from my peoples, my communities, my extended family in bond and blood that were never heard. This is for you.

Acknowledgements

There are numerous names that should be on this page, and I do not want to pick one over the other, and omit anybody. My sons, close friends, family members, relatives and professional mentors over the years have supported me as I strived to become the first Ph.D. in my family. Each memory and story that I share was made to transcend above hurts, wounds; and show the incredible tenacity and beauty of our souls. My Dissertation Advisor, Committee Members, and Research Mentors provided me with the theoretical, educational and technical expertise and guidance to help me realize this dream. My dream is now a reality and I am eternally grateful to all of you. Thank you for the hours of support, feedback and for being the embodiments of care, hope, love and soul in education.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION INQUIRY

Cheyennes on Soul: a dialogue

Me: "Mom, what did your parents or my grandparents teach you about Cheyenne beliefs on soul?"

Mother (Bernice): "Soul?!"

Me: "Yes, mother."

Mother: "Oh. My mother (Alice) said that without it,

you will die."

Background

My mother went on with details and expounded upon the fact that if a Cheyenne loses his/her soul, he/she would meet an ill fate. A Cheyenne's soul is not considered a trivial matter. Thus, it is something that you protect. This tribal and familial belief about soul reveals that it is our life-force or essence of life. Soul is about "who I am" as a Northern Cheyenne woman, mother and educator. It is more than "what I am". This core belief extends to all areas of my identity. Even if we consider it as a metaphor, as an educator, it is more than what I do – it is who I am. With the presence of soul in my teaching, my very being thrives.

This dissertation explores a pedagogical and hermeneutical inquiry about the soul of teaching. There is spirituality to teaching that can affect both educators and students in a respectable manner. Of course, this does not imply that any particular set of beliefs or religious tenets are more valuable than another. Rather, a case for soul does not require that teachers or students convert to any particular religion or imply a requirement for adherence to any such dogma. My project suggests that soul be present in whatever way

that educators find it best. Whether it is life in a spiritual walk, practice meditation, belief in whatever higher being (or not), secular rituals and the multitude of other ways that persons find in metaphysical beliefs. As I shared my own familial and tribal story, the soul is inextricable from our daily lives. What occurs when we leave our souls at the schoolhouse door? Are we our authentic selves if we ignore our life essence? Soul can be absent at times from discussions about education (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1995), and educators are not encouraged to embrace it. Not surprising, the current educational system is very empirically driven to arrive at "standards" and other measures of objectivity to show results. It begs a question: What effects do contrived and mechanized forms of education (via testing and prescribed curriculum) have on soul in teaching? The depths of teaching should not exist in limited forms of assessment or curricula.

Instrure vs. Educare

Haroutunian-Gordon asserts that the education system promotes *instrure* instead of *educare*. Educators may present subject matter and information to students that could be pre-determined as "students should know this." A deposit of knowledge in students does not exemplify the "turning of the soul". Instead, a system founded upon Classical philosophical writing becomes riddled with contradictions or misappropriations of concepts.

> According to Platonic metaphysics, the "world of becoming" is darkness, as no truth can be seen there. Only when the soul looks toward the world of being can the truth or essence of things be apprehended. For in that world there is light (p. 99).

Despite its lack of endorsement this does not render soul as absent from schools. Rather, this inquiry considers soul as necessary to the school experience. It is the educators and instructors within institutions, classrooms and buildings that should consider the inclusion of soul. The acknowledgement of its presence might yield meaningful and substantial results. Yet, Haroutunian-Gordon challenges us to partake in dialogue with our students that facilitates and imparts knowledge, wisdom and pursuit of "truth." Haroutunian-Gordon tackles the notion of "turning the soul" in her analysis of contemporary education.

> As we ponder the reforms needed in teacher preparation, we might consider offering both novice and experienced educators many more opportunities to draw out and develop their personal interests – even those which seem unrelated to their teaching. For in so doing, we may provide them with chances to examine that which appears to be true in the new light to which one becomes adjusted over a long period of exposure. Under such conditions, readjustment of personal and professional vision can take place, together with a turning of the soul, so that the truth about appearances may be seen. Who among us would not wish to be taught by such a soul? (p. 106-107).

My own "turning of the soul" over the course of my teaching career cannot be examined as stationary, static or as isolated. There are profound experiences that afforded me the opportunity to "draw out" and develop personal interests – even those which seem unrelated to teaching. All of my physical, mental, emotional and social experiences have resulted in who I am today. The reliance of intellect alone did not propel me into teaching. My journey as educator became about the essence of teaching and the

spirituality to teaching. Teaching is more than just caring for others. It is about purpose, passion, instinct, impalpable ways of knowing, intuitive teaching approaches, and finally coming into the understanding that I exist for a for a greater purpose- teaching.

As a Native American educator, I do not seek to further oppress or justify practices that further subjugate my people or any other groups. It is extremely important to acknowledge that any use of "Western" philosophers or theorists is not a tactical movement to "sell out" my indigenous roots. Nussbaum (2000) recognizes the criticism made against international feminists when they promote universal values for equality. "For it commonly said, such women are alienated from their culture, and are faddishly aping a Western political agenda," (p. 37). I do not aim to parrot doctrines that have oppressed tribal peoples. In addition, it is imperative that a high level of respect is paid to all faiths and belief systems. In particular, the sanctity of Native American spiritual and religious beliefs is not the primary aim of this manuscript. Appropriation of Native American spirituality and practices has been an on-going issue in society. My endeavor is not to reveal private spiritual practices that I perform to find my balance. I do not seek to take credit for ancient beliefs or practices that are not my own. As Smith (1998) described in her chapter:

> In response to the problem of spiritual appropriation, the Traditional Elders Circle has issued a communique on what is appropriate to share with non-Indians. This simple message is that all of creation is connected; people must live in balance with each other and with the earth to ensure our collective survival; abuse, repression, and exploitation of the earth's resources are not a part of the "natural law" (p. 188).

While I consider the appropriation of cultural and spiritual beliefs to be very important to the plight of tribal peoples, I am not going to focus on it anymore. This is a project that delves into my own articulation of what soul is in education. The teachings from my own tribal, cultural and familial beliefs are offered in good faith to others as a source of education and maybe even inspiration. Finally, this project does not seek to replicate any elitist agendas, nor does it seek to further divide an already controversial topic like soul in education. Rather, I will argue that alternative and indigenous ways of knowing are not being used to further divide an already complicated and at times, controversial issue like soul in education. This inquiry embarks on questioning my identity as a teacher, what am I without soul?

Get Over IT!

Three of the most destructive words that can be uttered toward another educator (person in general) are "get over it." These soul-sucking words did not provide comfort for me as began my career as a teacher in higher education. My education course covered topics that were tenuous, social issues (e.g. racism, gender, sexuality), of which I chose in my own class discussions. For instance, I assigned Lisa Delpit's (1995) *Other People's Children*, for the course reading and class discussion. The discussions were not forthcoming and almost strained. Delpit's book was absolutely full of references and dedicated to the intersecting lines of race, power, and the culture of power in the school system. I was a passionate educator that desperately wanted her students to engage in a similar manner with social justice issues. But, that did not happen. While a novice at the craft of teaching, I was academically and professionally prepared to take on my first classroom solo. The reluctance by students to wholeheartedly take on the text, or

converse on the matters left me in a forlorn state of being. Thus, the "tough love" advice of "get over it," did not soothe my spirit or calm my nerves. These experiences in the classroom brought me to another level of "education", if you will humor me? It was an education about soul in teaching, which originated from the void between theories into practice that demanded and required my attention.

Native American Cultural Worldviews

The soul is the life essence of individuals, and many Native American tribes/nations endorse spirituality in education. In fact, a differentiation was not made between intellectual and spiritual educational foundation beliefs in many tribal cultures. Cajete (1994) in *Look to the Mountain*, describes several elements of indigenous education. He asserts that teaching and learning are integrated and intertwined with many other elements. This is particularly important because it does not relegate the act of teaching and learning to some hollow or disconnected place. Further, his work incorporates a view of Nature that is held sacred. Instead of common stereotypes about Native Americans, his view is authentic and provides a deeper meaning to natural and ecological matters in education. As a student learns about biology, the teacher could include more meaningful, soulful or even sacred[1] examples, instead of the standard and sterile version of science.

Many Native American tribal cultures (including my own) have terms and concepts that are inter-dependent, inter-connected and weave themselves together for a

[1] Sacred is not limited to just religious artifacts, but it is extended to places, animals and many other entities.

whole. For example, to borrow a saying from my Lakota/Dakota friends and elders, their word for "all my relations:" *Mitakuye Oyasin*. Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) explains this:

> The Indian principle of interpretation/observation is simplicity itself: "We are all relatives." Most Indian hear this phrase thousands of times a year as they attend or perform ceremonies, and for many Indians without an ongoing ritual life, the phrase seems to be simply a liturgical blessing that includes all other forms of life in human ceremonial activities. But this phrase is very important as a practical methodological tool for investigating the natural world and drawing conclusions about it that can serve as guides for understanding nature and living comfortably within it (p. 34).

Admittedly, this is a concept that I heard numerous times growing up and into adulthood several times of year, after reading Deloria's explanation several thoughts came to mind. His position gave me a way to legitimate my thinking and analysis. He introduced me to the "methodological" side of "we are all relatives." His words legitimate my organic and cultural process for observation, curiosity and the desire to learn more about others. For example, it is very important for me to get to know others. I may come off as a little "nosey" as I inquire about where others are from, the regions from which they originate, or if they are tribal peoples I want to know what their tribes are or family ties. It is my personal way of collecting data to get to know others and understand the relationships between us.

While the vast diversity of indigenous tribes and nations may yield some similarities, I must tread carefully to not reinforce stereotypes. For the sake of my

argument for education, the term, Oyasin, best represents tribal culture and its potential to enhance soul in education. "We are all relatives" acknowledges the respect and inter-connectedness of Native Americans that is not just through a genetic or familial tie. From my own understanding and various lessons from a Lakota and Dakota person, it is critical to think of the term in more metaphysical terms which expands its usage to include animals, plants and other natural beings.

While all of his "foundation characteristics" of indigenous education are relevant to this inquiry, the following are particularly important:

- A sacred view of Nature permeates its foundation process of teaching and learning.
- Integration and interconnectedness are universal traits of its contexts and processes. (relationships between all in community)
- It recognizes and incorporates the principle of cycles within cycles (there are deeper levels of meaning to be found in every learning/teaching process).
- It recognizes that each person and each culture contains the seeds that are essential to their well-being and positive development. (beliefs based upon respect for others and inner knowledge)
- Art is a vehicle of utility and expression. It is recognized as an expression of the soul and a way of connecting people to their inner sources of life.
- Indigenous thinking adheres to the most subtle, yet deeply rooted, universals and principles of human learning (p. 29-30).

Cajete (2005) further describes the importance of connectedness in and amongst Native American tribes.

> Understanding the depth of relationships and the significance of participation in all aspects of life are the keys to traditional American Indian education. *Mitakuye Oyasin* (we are all related) is a Lakota phrase that captures an essence of tribal education because it reflects the understanding that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world (p. 70).

His argument asks educators to consider that there are more dimensions to education and our human lives. Cajete depicts the benefits to such an approach:

> Individuals were enabled to reach completeness by being encouraged to learn how to trust their natural instincts, to listen, to look, to create, to reflect and see things deeply, to understand and apply their intuitive intelligence, and to recognize and honor the Spirit within themselves and the natural world. This is the educational legacy of indigenous peoples. It is imperative that we revitalize its message and its way of educating for life's sake at this time of ecological crisis (p. 77).

It is worth the investigation to include many forms of information and perspectives during classes. I recognize the spirit inside of me and my work in the classroom tries to honor that spirit. It is the spirit of survival. It is very important that I maintain values like respect in my classroom, so that spirit not only in me but in others is honored. The next section describes the philosophical work of Viola Cordova. Her approach to philosophical analysis gives key boundaries to respect the integrity to American Indian tribes and nations.

Matrix for Thought

Dr. Viola Cordova was the first American Indian woman to receive a PhD in Western Philosophy. Her approach to philosophy provides the overall paradigm for this project. She warns us to always be aware of any assumptions (e.g. spirituality, God, etc.) that a researcher brings to an inquiry. It is very important as I present my narratives that I reflect on the factors that cloud or inhibit my viewpoints. Further, she asserts that Native American philosophies are not "primitive."

> One of the major obstacles to undertaking an examination of indigenous metaphysics is the result of another assumption that the researcher brings to his study: it is assumed that metaphysics is a philosophical activity that lies outside the capabilities of anyone other than "advanced" civilizations. An indigenous "tribal" culture, by virtue of not being a culture like that of the "advanced" West is presumed to be on a different level of "development." Such cultures are assumed to operate in the realm of *superstition* or *imagination* as opposed to the "higher" activities of *observation, experience and reflection*. That this is not the case should be obvious from the fact that numerous "tribal" peoples have managed not only to survive but thrive in very specific environments for thousands of years (p. 55).

The cultural values and beliefs that I hold as an educator and researcher are not "made-up" or silly superstitions. The case for indigenous ways of knowing (philosophical legitimacy) is being made in this treatise. Modern society should not be constrained by socially constructed biases or notions, but they undoubtedly exist. Thus, this is a case

for the inclusion of narratives from an educator that has been marginalized for her cultural background. It is in the context of not fitting into certain parts of institutions, or at other times, she is a part of a power structure, all of the layers will be scrutinized against Cordova's recommendation. Rather, this project recognizes and values the importance of universal values that can be shared across cultures.

In short, this manuscript is written from a different perspective about a crucial part of education- *soul*. It is important that I situate this project within a culturally appropriate approach. This is not just an advocacy point it is to promote an agenda that still demands attention in education. This is not to claim that Native American worldviews are different in a segregation manner, rather they still exist despite a brutal history in the U.S. Cordova further illustrates why a Native American philosophical perspective is necessary.

Consistently, there are three major assumptions made about Native American philosophy from many (although not all) Western points of view. Cordova's point is well taken about some Western philosophical views, and it is crucial to this inquiry. Her position instructs philosophers to examine their own personal biases or "slants" present in their analysis. She outlines the three major mistakes below:

> … (1) That all human beings share a common set of beliefs, (2) that non-Western peoples are a less complex form of being, less developed than the Westerner, and (3) that indigenous peoples are incapable of engaging in philosophical discussions (p. 58).

The first assumption is an easy trap to fall into in American society. While there can be many commonalities among culture, the distinction to make between cultures is most important. Cordova argues that understanding the distinctions between cultures does not make one culture more important than the other. It is not a ranking system; rather it is about understanding the distinctions. For example, present-day immigration issues cannot be sloppily glazed over with an out of context perspective. A third-generation colonial descendant who dismisses the experiences of a 1.5 generation (Rumbaut, 2004) Mexican American by stating that he/she "knows" their struggle since his/her great-grandfather came over from Europe in the early twentieth century. While both individuals are affected by immigration, the contemporary experiences for a new migrant to this country cannot completely be categorized into a different time era; in addition, it is dangerous to dismiss the current experiences of migrants with dismissive statements.

As I listen to my 1.5 generation students, I try to honor their stories and use them to better inform my practice. Instead of looking for similarities or commonalities that may or may not be there, this inquiry will suggest concepts that should not be judged from a "right or wrong" perspective. As I listen to my students talk about their families, experiences in refugee camps, or the plight of their relatives, I use it as a way to learn and humble myself. As a reminder for me, that different in the form of experiences does not always mean wrong. The ways in which my 1.5 generation students experience colonialism in this country or others is quite different from my own experiences or that of other tribal peoples. It is important that I do not make assumption about cultures or automatically seek out similarities as that can lead to errors in judgments.

The second assumption has been a pervasive issue that has persisted in American society. There were years of forced assimilation policies and forced conversion to Christianity[2]:

> The indigenous American – despite five hundred years of concerted efforts by government, the military, and educational and religious institutions to eradicate a conceptual framework alien to the West – has managed to maintain a separate identity based on a conceptual framework that still seems to provide a better explanatory framework than that offered by the West. The philosopher's challenge it to explore those basic concepts that lend validity to the American Indian Weltanschauung and find their origins, their force, the difference they make in how people live in the world (p. 68).

A major aim of this dissertation project to is to inform educational practice by the analysis of my narratives and classroom experiences, and perhaps ultimately, contribute to American Indian Weltanschauung.

The third assumption is important to recognize because it is a terrible falsehood, but remains a pervasive issue in society. The historical (racist) notion that Native Americans are inferior is not endorsed in this inquiry. American Indians in the United States have survived years of colonization tactics that have not effectively destroyed the ability to engage in meaningful philosophical debates. Cordova (2004) expands on this assumption:

[2] This project does not delve into an extensive historical detail about the US federal government policies toward American Indian tribes. __

> The assumptions that serve as roadblocks to understanding the worldviews or philosophical stances of others can be overcome through methods that the philosopher has at hand: he has made a distinction between logic, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. Those are the 'tools' or 'approaches' that should be used in attempting to analyze the thought of others. He lacks only one other 'tool'—the need to concentrate, not on similarities, but on differences. It is by contrasting notions that one learns about the distinction between the self and the Other. Those differences are what make the Other an Other (p. 60).

A concentration on differences should not be considered as intolerance or "bad". There can be a sense among educators to not "rock the boat" too much. Any discussion about differences is not intended to offend one culture over another. As Cordova elaborates: "But true tolerance also requires recognition that there may not be a vast universal, absolute Truth (with a capital 'T') (p. 60). This inquiry will work toward the recognition of differences as a greater method to understand other human experiences of soul and the benefit those have in education.

The paradigm of Cordova's concept of philosophical examination is known as a Matrix Approach:

> The worldview is made up of several descriptions and explanations that expand the basic descriptions. There are many terms used to describe this set of explanations: "conceptual framework," "frame of reference," "presuppositions," "paradigms," even "worldview." I prefer the term "matrix," since it implies a web of related concepts (p. 61).

The significance of this matrix approach is to address the depth and layers of the holistic work of an educator. The concept of soul has a multitude of interpretations across many cultures. The next segment of the inquiry explores the potential tensions and conflicts that may arise when two or more matrices collide in educational institutions; and later within the experiences of educators. Cordova's matrix approach was influenced by the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. His philosophical work guides this approach:

> The matrix forms a foundation upon which all else is explained. Once established, the matrix is unidentifiable to the user. It serves, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein states, as 'the inherited background against which I distinguish true and false' (p. 61).

The matrix is likened to a "world-picture":

> The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules (p.61).

Within the 'world-picture' there are going to be foundational premises and ultimately propositions that are exempt from scrutiny. To illustrate, growing up as a bi-racial child, I remember my parents teaching me to "marry my own kind." I mulled over that turn of phrase [own kind] and retorted with a critical question: "So, does this mean I find somebody who is Half-and-Half like me?" They became enraged with my question and consequently their answer was not delivered to me. Their proposition to "marry my own kind" was exempt from scrutiny. Despite my parents being an "inter-racial" couple, I was expected to play by the "dominant cultural" rules in society. Ironically, this example is that of a power play within itself, with the assumption being that I marry

somebody Caucasian like my father. Despite the ethical and social issues (to name a few), their stance should be considered as "Truth." Fortunately, people are not monolithic, my parents included. Their world-pictures changed drastically as years went by. The purpose of my stories is not to entrap my family in negative, fixed station in time. I offer them as bold acts to uncover how important the past, present, and future is in my life as an educator. Dewey (1938) discusses the role of the past in relation to present in *Experience and Education.* On page 75, "The educator more than the member of any other profession is concerned to have a long look ahead." Further ahead on page 76, "The educator by the very nature of his work is obliged to see his present work in terms of what it accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, for a future whose objects are linked with those of the present." Dewey makes the connections between past, present and future and the natural contingencies that exist within them. He does not separate or divide the past and its relationship to the present. He urges me as an educator to reflect on the past and its place in my present classroom. Naturally, I tend to "worry" as educator about the future outcomes and processes in my classroom. More specifically, I hold concern for the future of my students and what impact does my classroom have on their futures. In other words, I am very mindful of the connections between past, present and future. It is within those connections and experiences that I found my sense of soul.

Auto-narrative in Education

Narrative research is an important part of education. It is not a simplistic approach to tell stories. There are legitimate reasons to conduct narrative research and it for that reason that I employ it as my primary method for collecting information about my teaching and sharing my analysis. Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007) outline the

three commonplaces for narrative research: temporality, sociality, and place (p. 23). The first commonplace, temporality, consists of the past, present and future of people involved in the inquiry. The second commonplace, sociality, entails the feelings, desires, passions or the emotional side that makes up the relationship between the "inquirer and study participants." The second commonplace may not bear as much emphasis on my project as it is my own experiences as an educator. Finally, place is the third commonplace. This means the literal physical landscape and location of the events being recorded through the narratives. As I reflect and share my narratives, the location of events will bear an impact on my experiences. The important element to this research is for me to ensure that I am simultaneously analyzing my narratives with all three commonplaces. The depth that this analysis provides the critical piece to indigenous métissage. The details of métissage will be discussed within the subsequent chapter three.

The form to which I will share my narratives is through story snapshots and photographic images. I want to connect my vivid memories with images that I can share to bring visualization to my personal and familial narratives. This representative form is known as "snapshots." As noted by Clandinin, Pushor and Orr:

> Borrowing from a favorite novel, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), Pushor worked out the entailments of her metaphor of *photo album* and created word *Snapshots* to portray moments in her inquiry experience. She did not want to lose the sense of unfolding temporality as she then created "Memorybank Movies" that enlarged the snapshots with stories that told what was not visible

> and what was not audible in the snapshots. In this way she moved to considerations of place and the personal and social (p.32).

I want to expand my narratives from the page. Rich and descriptive language is very important to this process, but it is encouraged that "form" (p. 31) is seriously considered as I embark on this inquiry.

This is My Story

My history as a "mixed-blood" or as a "half-breed"[3] became a source of inspiration in my life. I was marked as a person who was not readily identifiable in terms of phenotype, so there was the physical difference. Below the surface level, there were different layers of emotional, mental and spiritual sojourning that I needed to journey through. The schism between the Native American and white world threw me into a constant state of flux. There was no remedy it was simply thrive or you will not survive. I sought out others who could see me. I wanted to be seen, heard and listened to… not in the psychological sense of selfishness or vanity. I was not a spoiled child in the midst of a temper tantrum. I wanted somebody else to acknowledge my existence. In spite of it all, I was worth it and meant to be. As a youngster when my mom would visit her family back home on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana, I could always tell when they were either referring to me or my Dad. The conversations were always held in Cheyenne, their mother-tongue. The minute I heard "vejo[4]" come up in the privileged conversation; I figured it was about me or my mom explained that my

[3] Common language used to describe American Indian children from inter-racial unions or relationships.
[4] Vejo is the Cheyenne word to describe the white man. Derived from its original description of a spider.

father was white. Thus, that word (vejo) became the signifier when my appearance or blood quantum was discussed during their talks.

In school, I learned that half-breed was almost always a put-down, so I grew used to the name-calling and the overwhelming sense of not fitting in or being accepted. Not to mention, I was an outlander anyway. I grew up on a reservation that was not my tribal affiliation. There were times when it was a lonely and emotionally taxing place. Where does a half-breed exist? It is a definite space split into two halves- hence another binary. Sadly, there were times when I asked if I should exist? When I was a youngster, I didn't have a collegiate vocabulary to articulate my frustrations; but I wanted to do something to bring about change. I could "feel" the tension if you will around these topics (and of course others).

I have a vocabulary now, and this project is to explore my journey as a teacher in higher education. The narrative approach to education is employed to accomplish that feat. More specifically, indigenous Métissage is utilized to depict my life stories as a way to contribute to the education field.

Focus of Project

This inquiry argues that the absence of soul actually hinders learning. Who exactly is a teacher without soul? The answer is complex. First, this study will explore the concept of soul in education. There are varying cultural, religious and spiritual ways to examine soul. This inquiry does not seek to prove the existence of soul. Its existence is considered to be complex, and even abstract, but exists nonetheless. Secondly, soul will be explored from a cross-cultural approach, which includes an emphasis on a Native American philosophical worldview and discourse. For example, Dr. Viola Cordova's

work will guide this inquiry, and a number of other educational scholars (e.g. John Dewey) will be used to shape an argument for attention to soul in education. This inquiry provides a cross-cultural analysis, which can enrich the existing dialogue on this fascinating and tangled subject. Third, this project utilizes Métissage to provide a portrait into my classroom teaching and experiences. This section addresses the "how" question. My approach involves teacher autobiography and auto-narrative to provide insights to teacher identity and the presence of soul in education. Thus, the fourth section provides a literature review of influential scholars on my practice and theoretical underpinnings in education. The remaining chapters present the métissage themes for this project will be presented through an analysis of my college classroom and teaching practices. In short, my narratives will be examined for evidence of soul as my guiding questions for this segment of the inquiry: (a). what does soul look like in my classroom? (b). who is a teacher without soul? Obviously, soul is not a tangible object. This inquiry does not pretend to be able to "measure" soul; rather, this inquiry will interrogate the ways in which I bring soul forward into the classroom. Classroom stories can provide key evidence about the benefits of soul to relationships between me and my students. Finally, soul is crucial to educators and students. Socrates, like his mentor, Plato (1986) described education as "leading or drawing education out of the student." A cross-cultural analysis of soul in education, not only promotes tribal cultures, it affords a space to investigate differences and similarities within cultural views for the sake of discovery instead of subjugation. Cultural perspectives on this matter are crucial to examine about this essential area in educational philosophy.

The next chapter is going to examine the "why" question of this project. In other words, why is this type of research important for educational research? The investigation of soul in teaching requires attention to what it entails. The recognition of soul does not require the adoption of a religion or the rejection of any religious beliefs. Chapter two investigates the concept of soul as a philosophical enquiry to arrive at a meaningful and mindful definition of what soul is in education.

CHAPTER TWO: SOUL IN EDUCATION

The Why Question

"I have lived my life. I am ready." – Dull Knife

Soul

The concept of soul can be quite controversial in educational institutions. This study purports that soul is an important part of relationships between educators and students; yet, soul remains a place of tension and may even be absent in higher education. Certainly, soul is a part of many faiths and religious belief systems; however, I do not assert that religion or a faith-based approach must be present to arrive at soul in education. The role of an educator is not to proselytize a religion. This project does not disregard any religion of faith; rather, it aims to respect the sanctity of those beliefs. Thus, it is not my position to debate religion or the validity of any specific dogma in this project. Thus, the concept of soul will be viewed as the unseen parts of a teacher or in the classroom; and, soul will be considered as visible in classrooms. The "life-force" of teacher identity and the heart of learning and growth. Soul is regarded as *sine qua non* to my teaching.

My traditional worldviews on existence revolve around a sense of soul. I do not have to question my existence, per se. I exist to help others. It satisfies me, it completes me, and it is who I am called to be – a teacher. I teach a Career Development Seminar, and a major lesson for students in the first couple of weeks is to think about their "dream job." "Do what your heart wants you to do in life," a statement I say to my students over and over. Of course, I do not offer this without watchfulness as to not encourage extreme

or inappropriate goals. In other words, if a student describes their dream job in organized crime, I would not leave their ambition unchecked. As Dewey (1938) warns us, not all classroom exercises or experiences are "educative". He asserts, "The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). A carefully designed lab experiment or discussion exercise does not equal educational in itself. As an instructor, I had to understand that neither subject matter nor experience alone translate into education let alone learning for my students. Dewey pursues this concept further by pointing out that not all experiences are positive rather some experiences can mis-educate a student. The notion of working in a position or career that your heart wants you to do is not a new notion necessarily, but I take careful steps to help my students develop their initial ideas on following their heart. It is more so a matter of mustering the courage to actually do what your heart calls you to do, but I cannot just let my students wade through my course without directions or connections. Hence, what is the connection between heart and soul? An age-old question indeed, however, the connection being made here is the interactions between feelings, emotions, senses, beliefs, and instincts between heart and soul that bring a student into a well-thought out decision about what career is best for their lives.

The subsequent sections of this chapter outline a brief history of soul via theorists and philosophers. Education cannot be empty and shallow. The transmission of empty facts, figures and information cannot completely satisfy the human spirit. As Parker Palmer (2010) depicts in his book chapter:

> Advocates for integrative education take facts and rationality seriously; the failure to do so would betray our DNA. But we also seek forms of knowing, teaching, and learning that offer more nourishment than the thin soup served up when data and logic are the only ingredients (p. 21).

He argues further that science does not rely solely on objectivism. "It depends on bodily knowledge, intuition, imagination, and aesthetic sensibility, as you can learn from any mathematician who has been led to a proof by its 'elegance'" (p. 21). He calls for an integrative pedagogy with a sense of "wholeness" instead of further compartmentalization in higher education. Eventually, this type of education seeks to unify what can be considered oppositional forces like subjectivity with facts. The "lenses" through which we view our environments are entirely subject to our biases, beliefs, and many other factors. Yet, what can be learned when we study other cultures as a way to analyze our own privilege. My students are given information about other ways of living in the world to broaden their perspectives. However, I cannot stop at a simple transmission of facts and information and expect that to suffice. Palmer (2010) described his education about the Holocaust, and how it eventually led to his discovery of his privilege. He did not understand the various layers and the long-standing effects of that despicable portion of human history. He reflects: "On a more personal level, only later did I begin to understand that I have within myself a certain 'fascism of the heart' that would 'kill off' anyone who threatens my cherished world view – not with a gas chamber, but with a mental or verbal dismissal that renders that person irrelevant in my life" (p. 32). This revelation in his thinking came after he "appropriated" the Holocaust to examine his own life was he able to build his own "moral foundation." His writing

reaches out to me and the work that I strive to do within my own classroom and community involvement. I seek to enable students to reach beyond their own sense of privilege, beyond facts and figures to arrive at a deeper level of understanding. I do not wish to perpetuate hollow educational experiences in my classroom. While these are noble "wishes" for my classroom, it causes me to address my own privilege as the authority figure in the classroom. Further, I have to be conscious of any biases or agendas that I bring forth in the classroom on a passionate subject. I cannot expect students to follow my teachings blindly, and it is certain that addressing the privilege someone holds is bound to come with questioning or even resistance. It is through the process of challenging privilege and seeking to understand the layers behind it that give way to a powerful learning experience. An experience that has the potential to move beyond a shallow history lesson about the plight of people, to a lesson about human history that reveals not only the atrocity but various other layers. Palmer's point resonates with me and it causes me to return to Dewey.

Dewey was critical of the compartmentalization and division between subject matter and teaching. He encouraged a holistic approach to education for children in schools. Dewey's (1897) philosophy was that of the development of the "whole child" and that the school approaches education from such a way that reinforces that notion. The child (student) in school should be exposed to various activities that developed his/her full potential. This philosophy while grounded in academic subject matter included outside classroom experiences. The perspective and learning of the student would benefit from outside classroom experiences. His philosophy has been crucial to me as an educator. It has afforded me with the insight and knowledge to implement my

values into my classroom. Further, his sage advice affords me the chance to confront any tenuous or controversial subject matters from a stance of growth and opportunity instead of fear or resentment. His following passage from *Art as Experience* (1934) is relevant to this inquiry:

> The institutional life of mankind is marked by disorganization. This disorder is often disguised by the fact that it takes the form of static division into classes, and this static separation is accepted as the very essence of order as long as it is fixed and so accepted as not to generate open conflict. Life is compartmentalized and the institutionalized compartments are classified as high and as low; their values as profane and spiritual, as material and ideal… Compartmentalization of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called 'practice' from insight, of imagination of executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing (p. 21)

One of my biggest fears as an educator is to perpetuate compartmentalization in my classroom and an absence of soul. While a necessary skill at times, compartmentalization does not always work toward an authentic or holistic classroom. Organization of ideas and subject material is necessary, but it need not be at the expense of the omission of pertinent, outside of the classroom experiences. One of my earliest memories of and connections that I made to Deweyan philosophy was his advocacy for the whole student. The reality can be though for many teachers today that time is extremely limited. The question becomes "how does one attend to the whole student?" I find it may be my role to help students begin to figure out that dream job or ideal career. I understand my

limitations and realize that I cannot pick their career for them. As I investigate soul further, some of the answers I seek can be found through analysis of self.

Soul's Calling

Parker Palmer (2003) addressed the concept of spirituality in education. He has devoted his life's work on this subject matter. Palmer posits that teachers reckon with the dilemma of their "soul's calling." Teachers are tasked with the burden of educating children, students, the loved ones of others every day. It is plausible that teachers are not in their field for trivial reasons. Teaching is undoubtedly a part of their identities, and some (like me) argue a part of their souls. Due to many reasons in society, there are a lot of accountability factors in teaching. Not surprisingly, stakeholders want to know how their children are being taught. This can present many challenges for educators as they struggle to keep stride with district curriculum, attend to the whole student, and meet other sets of expectations (e.g. parents, administrators). Palmer shows concern toward this issue: "Challenges of this sort are well known to many teachers these days as they seek some way to negotiate between the demands of high-stakes testing and the deeper needs of their students" (p. 377). The negotiation of all of the factors in a teacher's life is not insignificant. The challenges in teaching leave a lot of room for growth.

Palmer cautions us to not give little regard to this controversial aspect of life and education. He addresses that "it" (soul) is indeed the very essence that many educators do regard in students. "For 'it' is the ontological reality of being human that keeps us from regarding ourselves, our colleagues, or our students as raw material to be molded into whatever form serves the reigning economic or political regime" (p. 378). Spirituality is not usually endorsed or propagated in schools, unless in a private or

religious school. Any definition of soul, in terms of "essence", or even more so as a "source of life" is unsupported by many (not all, excluding religious, alternative, or private) schools. In an article for Change magazine, Palmer (2007) asserts five proposals for higher education to transform its current systems. The most relevant to this project is his third recommendation: "We must do more than affirm and harness the power of emotions to animate learning and leadership: We must help our students develop the skill of 'mining' their emotions for knowledge" (p. 5/8). This project seeks to address soul in teaching in higher education as more than just superstitious fancy or inapplicable silly emotions. Again, attention to the "whole" student need not be a decree from one religious set of beliefs over another.

Leonard J. Waks (1995) delivers a profound argument for wholeness in education. He analyzed the teachings of three of the greatest teachers in human history: Socrates, Jesus and Buddha. He addressed that concept through each of the great teacher's tradition. The relevance of his work to this project belies in this statement:

> Institutions devoted to keeping these wisdoms and their discoveries alive and teaching them to humanity anew have often occasioned experiences of separateness and isolation. Their polar thinking has at times reduced unifying insights to slogans of separate warring campus. Contemporary teachers embracing "whole person" and "one world" perspectives walk in the footsteps of these great teachers – they long to experience, and to share, that sense of wholeness and unity in our fragmented and divided world (p. 85).

This segment draws upon the similarities (not uniformity) between these great teachers, and it is that recognition instead of competition between philosophical or religious schools that is most favorable. As noted by the author, contemporary educators follow in the footsteps of many great ancient teachers (and ancestors). This is not about ranking one over another; it is about the meaning and the promotion of "wholeness" in education. If we return briefly to earlier philosophers that request for differences to be acknowledged, this might seem incongruent. The aim for the inclusion of this scholarship is to point out that there can be similarities found among very different religious and spiritual leaders. It is not to disrespect the beliefs of anybody, rather it is to outline the manner in which similarities can be made.

Further, Waks (1995) eloquently depicts the ultimate sacrifice of Socrates:

> Instead of apologizing and begging the jury to spare him, Socrates provoked them with yet another discomforting philosophy lesson. He asserted that his fellow citizens might indeed destroy his body. But something far more valuable, something at the very core of a life worth living, would be destroyed if, out of fear, he were to abandon the guiding principles of his life. This more valuable something he called his "psyche" or soul (see chapter 7), and scholars credit Socrates with the original discovery that life-directing principles which recommend themselves to conscious reasoning are the core of the "psyche" (p. 86).

For the purpose of description, this poignant description was included to segue into the next segment of the chapter. (The chapter seven that Waks alluded to in his segment will

be addressed a little later.) The next section will give a brief overview of the ancient Western perspectives on soul.

Plato and Soul

The Classicists considered soul to be critical to the physical self. In particular, Plato's three-part analogy to the soul is often cited and analyzed in various forms of literature. This project does not delve into great detail about the ancient Greek, Platonic or Aristotelian views on soul. However, it is necessary to provide some background and historical understanding to the concept of soul in Western philosophy.

In the *Republic*, Plato (1986) makes a distinction about his argument that has influenced educators for centuries. It is an immortal tale about knowledge and enlightenment.

> But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes. They undoubtedly say this, he replied. Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good (p. 258).

The educator does not have to "put in" knowledge, virtue or the like. Rather, an educator shall undertake such a method that brings about the necessary questions to challenge

students. The intention not to dissuade or de-motivate the student, or just let them go without direction. The aim is to assist a student with their own development of the soul. The concept of soul shall not be constrained to limited forms of analysis.

Haroutunian-Gordon (1995) discusses the relevance and "beauty" of Plato's analogies about soul. First, in his "true analogy" and is present an example of a body with an eye.

> The eye – analogous to the instrument of apprehension – can see only under a particular circumstance, namely, when the body in which it is housed turns and "looks" with it (p. 98).

In his second analogy, Plato determines the soul is divided into three parts, like the "periaktoi."

> According to ancient authority on the subject, Vitruvius, the periaktoi were "triangular pieces of machinery which revolve, each having three decorated faces and three kinds of scene – tragic, comic, and satiric" (p. 98).

The periaktoi allows the turning of the "eye" and its "body" to shift from darkness into light. The relevance of this analogy to contemporary education is critical.

Aristotle and Soul

There is a pervasive claim that Aristotle held two different views on the human soul in his lifetime. For the sake of this project, the following Aristotelian "definition" is utilized to capture his classical argument from a modern translation of Nicomachean Ethics (2009):

> But clearly the virtue we must study is human virtue; for the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness. By human virtue we mean not that of the body but that of the soul; and happiness also we call an activity of soul (Ch. 13)

For Aristotle, the soul was the cause of life and specifically for human beings it was to be governed by rationality. The human body is not independent from the soul. The soul constitutes the totality of the human body. In essence, the soul is what makes us human beings.

Spiritual Exercises

Pierre Hadot (1995) discussed the historical and ancient approaches to philosophy. His extensive and enlightening work on the history of philosophy reveals a major caution about the method of philosophical inquiry. His view informs me that philosophical analysis is grounded in my perspective.

> It is clear that historians of philosophy must use the greatest caution in applying the idea of "system" for the comprehension of the philosophical works of antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is not the case that every properly philosophical endeavor is "systematic" in the Kantian or Hegelian sense… But to study the actual progress of exegetical thought is to begin to realize that thought can function rationally in many different ways, which are not necessarily the same as those of the mathematical logic or Hegelian dialect (p. 76).

As I read his text, I made connections to my own family's story. In some cases, the ancient Greeks were somewhat similar to indigenous philosophical beliefs in that the

"present" yields happiness. This advice can serve as crucial when applied to the classroom experiences of educators. The usage of this ancient wisdom could help educators keep a tie to the present that could prevent over-thinking. Hadot (1995) investigated the relationship between ancient beliefs on past, present and future.

> Both the Stoics and the Epicureans advised us to live in the present, letting ourselves be neither troubled by the past, nor worried by the uncertainty of the future. For both these schools of thought, the present sufficed for happiness, because it was the only reality which belongs to us and depends on us (p. 268).

The past can often be used as a means to not act in a compassionate way toward somebody or cause. The ability to overcome grudges would seem to be very wise to practice as an educator. Yet, this is not easily overcome for all. In addition, the future is regarded as a mystery, uncontrollable (despite any attempts), there is a vulnerability to what the future holds. How can a person avoid those feelings? The overwhelming feelings might be tamed by a sense of "staying in the present." The control of thoughts would be beneficial for educators to abide to in daily interactions in the classroom. His notation speaks out to me as a person with a case of "racing mind" on a daily basis. Hadot imparts the ancient knowledge of Socrates through the explanation of "spiritual exercises."

Pierre Hadot engages the reader with a provocative term: spiritual exercises. As I endeavored upon his chapter of same title, I was indeed hooked by the bait. He distinguished the various reasons as to why spiritual was the apt choice. "Thought",

"intellectual", and "ethical" exercises do not provide the broad enough meaning to arrive at his conceptual definition.

> The word "spiritual" is quite apt to make us understand that these exercises are the result, not merely of thought, but of the individual's entire psychism. Above all, the word "spiritual" reveals the true dimensions of these exercises. By means of them, the individual raises himself up to the life of the objective Spirit; that is to say, he re-places himself within the perspective of the Whole ("Become eternal by transcending yourself') (p. 82).

Spiritual exercises provide a manner for teachers in contemporary times to understanding philosophy as a way of life. Further, these exercises enable contemporary educators a means to examine his/her practice. As I read through Hadot's text, I was struck by the third "spiritual exercise" that he revealed- Learning to Die. This spiritual exercise entailed the "training for death." Socrates faced his accusers and ultimately paid the ultimate sacrifice. He gave his life to defend his principles and more so for the sake of philosophical inquiry itself. His conscious act to choose death over a more vile human existence (alive) revealed his transcendence of self. Hadot describes the Platonic view on this particular exercise.

> For Plato, training for death is a spiritual exercise which consists in changing one's point of view. We are to change from a vision of things dominated by individual passions to a representation of the world governed by the universality and objectivity of thought (p. 96).

Hadot depicts this exercise further by the following passage:

> From such a perspective, even physics becomes a spiritual exercise, which is situated on three levels. In the first place, physics can be a contemplative activity, which has its end in itself, providing joy and serenity to the soul, and liberating it from day-to-day worries. This is the spirit of Aristotelian physics: "nature, which fashioned creatures, gives amazing pleasure in their study to all who can trace links of causation, and are naturally philosophers." As we have seen, it was in this contemplation of nature that the Epicurean Lucretius found a "divine delight." For the Stoic Epictetus, the meaning of our existence resides in this contemplation: we have been placed on earth in order to contemplate divine creation, and we must not die before we have witnessed its marvels and lived in harmony with nature (p. 97).

Ultimately, the exercises of learning to die entails the stripping away of the "passions" that govern our minds and soul. To become objective and strive for a higher understanding of self, reveals the immortality of the soul. The loss of passions though may not always be the best thing. I have a particular story from my own family's history that shows that there are times when passion and sheer will to survive can surpass any rational thought process. There are times when life is going to subject test our rational thinking.

Fearless Words

This particular exercise reminded me of my ancestor, Chief Dullknife. I reflected upon my great-great grandfather's legendary yet mysterious advice. A modern day interpretation may not appreciate the sacrifice and fearlessness that is packed within his

words: “I have lived my life. I am ready.” In the face of imminent death and imprisonment with his people (Cheyenne) in Fort Robinson. The women of his family and tribal band pleaded with the men to go down fighting. My ancestral grandfather faced an impossible situation and his own mortality, much like Socrates did. While an extreme risk, my ancestor made a successful yet very costly escape from Fort Robinson. Several members were gunned down as they fled the barracks. Yet, they were driven by their passions and will to live as free men, women and children. This is an incredible testament to human survival that was passed down to me by my mother. It was recited to me, and it became more relevant when my mother took her young daughters to Fort Robinson near Crawford, NE. She re-told the stories of the bravery and the death of one of Dullknife’s daughters. She gave her life so that the others could get away. Within those experiences and stories, an incredible amount of reverence was instilled in me.

As I reflected back on that vignettes from my family’s history, in one way it revealed the simplicity of the will to live- to survive. Socrates sacrificed his life as a protest to the society that wanted to suppress and dismiss his philosophies. He (Socrates) would never know the incredible influence his teachings would have on generations to come. He influenced entire schools of thought. My own ancestral grandfather had no way of foretelling the influence he would have on generations to come. His decision to fight for his people and their dignity as human beings would alter the future to come. It is the sacrifice in both cases that brings an incredible amount of perspective and depth to my thinking.

It is important to return to Aristotle. Aristotle supported reasoning, of which emotions or passions could cloud our thinking. It is unreasonable to expect that decisions

should always be made with complete reliance on emotions. There are times that rational thinking must prevail. As I think back to a verbal conflict that erupted in my classroom, I had no choice but to exercise very staunch rational thinking. In a situation that could go from bad to worse, I had to employ reasoning to de-escalate the situation, despite the level of anger and fear that I had during the outburst. Four students in my classroom brought a fight from the dormitory into my classroom that almost resulted in a physical fight. This was a different experience for me, and certainly not something I expected in my college classroom. The shock of this incident forced me to examine my syllabus, my stance on disciplinary action, and critically examine the place of experience in my classroom. Since the fight involved student-athletes, I had to take extra time to meet with their coaches and academic support staff about the incidents. The unexpected and blatant disturbances in my classroom caused me to assume unnatural traits – strict discipline. The sacredness of my classroom was violated by this petty act of ego. Yet, as the authority figure I had to enact order back into my classroom. I had to pick the pieces up and move on. After all of this time, I still recall the feeling that something changed inside of me after going through that experience. A new defense mechanism started after that day. My classroom through which I always found solace had become a "combat zone". My old notions of a democratic classroom gave away to the totalitarianism of a restricted environment. A part of my "live" classroom died as I reacted to the introduction of violence into its hallowed ground. I struggled to re-build a sense of normalcy in my classroom and amongst my students. While an unfortunate incident, I could not let my anger and passions further compound the situation. Fortunately, I did not let hope for growth wither away.

Hadot (1995) explains the Aristotelian notion of philosophy and its relationship to the mind.

> It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle was a pure theoretician, but for him, too, philosophy was incapable of being reduced to philosophical discourse, or to a body of knowledge. Rather, philosophy for Aristotle was a quality of the mind, the result of an inner transformation. The form of life preached by Aristotle was the life according to the mind (p. 269).

Hadot's text further showed the sharp contrast between ancient and more contemporary philosophy. "Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists," (p. 272). Spirituality in education cannot be looked upon with strict and technical perspectives. Any attempts to be completely binary or simplistic are dangerous and rigid. I do not intend to advocate one extreme over another. A classroom completely full of emotions could become chaotic, on the other hand, a classroom devoid of any emotions could become sterile and lack stimulation. The quest is to find that common ground or in-between space to bring about learning in a non-threatening manner. The next section provides a potential way to think about that search for teaching without extremities.

Karl D. Hostetler (2011) in *Seducing Souls: Education and the Experience of Well-Being*, addresses the complexities of philosophical modes of thoughts and queries. He delves into spiritual exercises as well in his text. Hostetler's perspective brings the philosophical concept of well-being into the forefront. He asks educators to examine

their own practices, so that the foundational tenets of spiritual exercises such as dialogue in the classroom can be a part of their craft. His claim that a "seduction of souls" takes place in the classroom to facilitate meaningful dialogue in and amongst the teacher and student is paramount. In particular, this segment is relevant to this project:

> Similarly, perhaps a teacher has to play a role in order to keep dialogue going, to ease students' frustrations by saying he's frustrated, too, for example. Perhaps it is deceptive in a way when a teacher does not say what he thinks but, rather, what he takes the logos to require. Perhaps he needs to inflame or feign passion to keep dominant opinions from closing down dialogue. We have to view these seductions and deceits (if we want to call them that) in terms of their purpose and results. The aim is not merely to trick students but to draw them into experience and better understanding of themselves and their welfare (p. 192).

Dr. Hostetler cautions that meaningful dialogue cannot be realized merely through skills and "methods". Rather, he challenges the manner in which such a "practice" is utilized. As he notes, Gadamer suggests that it is not solely the students that are "seduced" and consequently affected by the mutual inter-dependence. The teacher himself or herself will be drawn in to the process and effected as well, which indicates that teachers cannot rely only on strategies or subject matter to sustain meaningful interactions. The importance of his ideas on my work is the connections being made between teacher and student, texts and subject matter, and classrooms and learning. The entire relationship between teachers and students is considered as intertwined and protected by an honorable state of care and concern for the safety and well-being of students. The student is not

considered a mere serf in the kingdom of education. It is that respect, and the careful use of dialogue that influences my own work as an educator.

Soul in Action

Teaching is at the very heart of who I am as a person. My teaching is infused with a great deal of soul, passion and fervor. Yet, I am left with many remaining philosophical and practical questions. How do I embody soul in the classroom?

hooks (1994) in Teaching to Transgress acknowledges that the convergence between theory and practice can be very difficult. Through her teaching of critical pedagogy with students, a degree of "pain" is witnessed in the classroom.

> And I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain. And I include recognition of it now when I teach, that is to say, I teach about shifting paradigms and talk about the discomfort it can cause (p. 43).

Although hooks depicts her students in this segment, I could identify with it as an educator. I did not expect my own liberation to come from painful experiences in my life. I was extremely vigilant about "making it" as Colette, the scholar or educator, and not because of my racial/political background. Yet, this entire time it is my very being and cultural background along with my life experiences that has brought me to where I am today. I dedicated my career to bringing about change, to resist the damages of assimilative practices or not end up "pushed out" of a biased system. hooks (1995)

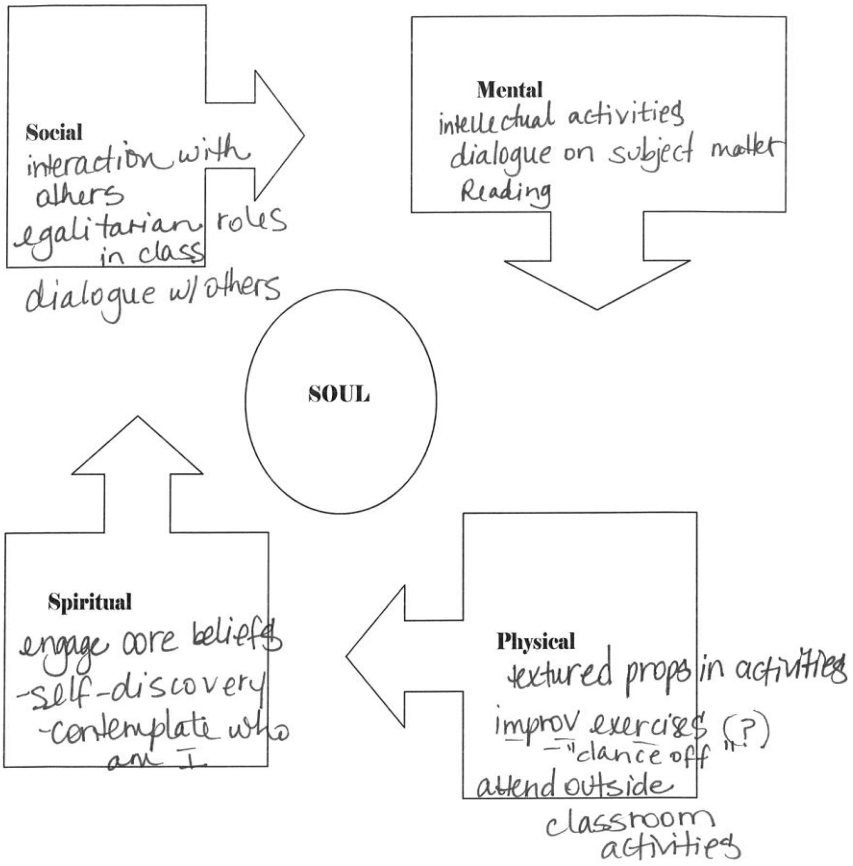
captures the sentiment of my approach to education: “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p13).

I seek those deeper connections that exist below the surface level. It starts with the manner in which I am going to investigate the incredibly huge concept of soul. In order to give a form to this analysis, I employ an approach that is rooted in teacher-narrative. The next chapter reveals the approach to analyze my teaching and my foundational belief in soul. The métissage approach affords me a way to incorporate my stories as a way to engage the concept of soul and spirit in education. My own stories as a Northern Cheyenne educator are the medium for which to analyze the influences on my path to the professoriate.

The picture below shows the process I used to conceptualize some of my core beliefs and pedagogical approaches to soul in my teaching.

CMHolite ☺

Holistic Approach to Education



CHAPTER THREE: SOUL AS A LIFE-FORCE IN TEACHING, BUT WHERE IS IT?

The How Question

I'm a storyteller. This is my story about "soul." It has kept me alive for this long.

~ Colette M. Polite

Chapter Three delves into an analysis of soul in education as a type of emotional intelligence and life-force that is inseparable from teacher identity. For example, the identity of a teacher is a critical part of educational research that cannot receive enough attention. Further, I assert that the identity of a Native American educator must be given a platform outside of the dominant canon of the education system. On-going systemic and historical biases toward education are regarded as inappropriate, this includes toward teacher identity. In this era of positivism in education (via standards and testing), it is critical to consider alternatives that can facilitate holistic and spirit-filled education. Scholars like Barone and Eisner (2006) advocate for arts-based education research approaches for educators to utilize. The "narrative construction" (p.98) of events, places, and occurrences are synthesized into stories. This approach to educational research upholds the teacher as scholar in the classroom.

This project does not support the appropriation of Native American culture, rather, my narrative as a mixed-race Northern Cheyenne educator[5] at a predominantly white university (PWU) contributes to the dialogue of the many complexities of teacher-identity in higher education. Further, this dissertation approaches teaching with soul as an act of ethical importance. To achieve this project, Indigenous Métissage will be

[5] The layers and different facets of "who" I am are explored in further detail. This account does seek to dismiss or trivialize the importance of identity.

employed to examine and interrogate my narrative and stories from my classroom for soul.

Métissage provides a form to this essay

A major influence is the work of Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009), Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times.

> Our writing illustrates Métissage as an artful research praxis that mixes binaries such as colonized with colonizer, local with global, East with West, North with South, particular universal, feminine with masculine, vernacular with literate, and theory with practice. We braid strands of place and space, memory and history, ancestry and (mixed) race, language and literacy, familiar and strange, with strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re)creation, and renewal into a Métissage (p.9).

Auto-narrative and autobiography have been long pursued and supported in educational research.

> Hasebe-Ludt, *et al.* (2009) utilize the following definition to depict autobiographical works:
>
> Through autobiographical writing, the writer can educate her attention to the lifeworld, where she dwells and with whom she dwells in that world; she can develop her direct sentient engagement with that world and all its ecological relations (p. 29).

My life stories as an educator reveals the ways in which my teaching has transcended into a multi-faceted collage of connections. With respect to the unique cultural perspective

that I hold toward teaching and higher education, an alternative method for inquiry and analysis is critical to keeping my voice intact.

Donald (2012) discusses the benefit and appropriateness of Métissage for indigenous researchers.

> As I will show, Indigenous Métissage is a research sensibility that enables me to do this. One central goal of doing Indigenous Métissage is to enact ethical relationality as a philosophical commitment. Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other (p. 535).

Hence, this does not mean that the use of ecological is limited to nature or the environment. Further, "ethical relationality" does not demand "sameness." Rather Donald clarifies the unique significance of what Métissage can do for indigenous contributions to research.

> This form of relationality is instead an ethical stance that requires attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation. It means that there is something at stake in saying so beyond postmodernism, new-age spiritualism, or "playing nice." These philosophical teachings emphasize that relationality is not just a simple recognition of shared humanity that looks to celebrate our sameness rather than difference. Rather, this form of relationality carefully attends to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across perceived frontiers of

> difference. This concept of relationality instantiates an ethical imperative to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others… (p. 536).

The ethic of relationality goes beyond the surface level of difference to attend to the understandings that a person holds to those perceived points of departure. It asks for the reader to go beyond the analysis of similarities between situations or experiences in this case, to address those distinctions that make up the ways of knowing for that particular individual. Again, in this case, I would like to shed light on the manner in which my experiences as an educator have shaped who I am, of course, but also the way in which my presence has shaped the lives of others in my classrooms, workplaces or other professional relationships. The most attractive thing about Métissage is its ability to braid experiences within and amongst one another. In my mind as a Native American student, mother, educator and community advocate this is of the utmost importance.

Donald writes:

> For me, Métissage is a research sensibility that mixes and purposefully juxtaposes diverse forms of texts as a way to reveal that multiple sources and perspectives influence experiences and memories. Métissage, as research praxis, is about relationality and the desire to treat texts – and lives – as relational and braided rather than isolated and independent. I explicitly connect Métissage to the legacies of colonialism and the need for recognition of the mutual venerability and dependency of colonizer and colonized, insider and outsider, as well as the presumed primacy of 'literate' societies over repressed oral traditions and storytelling (p. 537-538).

The key feature of Métissage for me as educator and scholar, is the potential to create those relational connections in my practice. I reflect back on my experiences as an educator as all inter-woven and connected. There are indeed distinctions within my "episodes" in life. I use the word episode to describe my different points in life and my career. Throughout my educational experiences both as student and teacher, I have struggled with disconnection. A term I call this is compartmentalization. I find it very difficult to separate my life into sections that are independent from each other. My conceptualization has been one of inter-connected and inter-dependent, and my characterization for my stages of life is that of episode. Episodes are the sub-sections to the larger story, my story.

As I noted, autobiography is not a new concept to educational research and practice. Donald cites Zuss (1997) in his 2011 research article to further explain the role and benefits of Métissage to pedagogical research.

> Zuss considers autobiographical Métissage as one powerful way to contest exclusivist and divisive identity claims. The assumption is that life-writings achieve worth when they are written in direct interface with stories and contexts of others (p. 537).

Educators feel the pull and strain of conformity. The harsh reality of work within higher education institutions may not always support a multi-faceted identity and a complex individual. The status quo is not easily rocked (for some important reasons), yet college level instructors find themselves in a business driven enterprise that may not include the discovery of one's identity.

The acknowledgement of the inertia of higher education bureaucracy should not dissuade a meaningful inquiry about the complexities of a Native American college instructor and the work I do with first-generation college students. Many students find themselves in a state of discovery, flux and even questioning their own identities. College is full of choices, new ideas, learning and a host of other positive things. Yet still, college students of modern time are labeled as not well equipped to cope with "crisis" or disasters. Instead of poking fun at students, this project seeks to challenge teacher identity. Growth as an educator did not stop for me upon graduation, the recipient of credentials or at some arbitrary age in my life development. The story of a person can be re-told and re-examined many, many times. I shudder to think if even one of my former professors or supervisors did not afford me the chance to make mistakes and grow. It is important that the lives of students are not restricted to one or two encounters in a classroom. Thus, my story as an educator is about fluidity, challenges and as life in a state of mestizaje or cultural fusion.

Métissage as a Way to Re-Story

Zuss (1995) depicts the connection of Métissage as a "pedagogical practice" (p. 27). Métissage affords me the ability to re-story and re-examine my practices, my skills, and perhaps most importantly my very being as an educator.

Zuss elaborates on it:

> Métissage serves as a way of describing textual practices that deliberately braid the multiple and composite identities intentionally drawn from experience in acts of self-authorization. It is a way of acting and reflecting upon multiplicity without essentializing any aspect. This is particularly applicable to the experience

> of exile, physical, emotional or political, and the plight of immigrant populations (p. 29).

Martinican poet, Edouard Glissant employed métissage as a way to disembark from any Eurocentric connotation to echo the experiences and complexities of Afro-Caribbean peoples. As Zuss further points out: "It is intended as an affirmation, actively reenvoicing histories of derided, subjugated names: mestizo, metis, half breed, mestizo, mixed race" (p. 29). I am "metis" and Métissage provides educators like me the ability to weave our stories from our particular standpoint. The caution about the application of some postcolonial paradigms to indigenous experiences, is that the famous scholars wrote in a particular place in the world, e.g. Caribbean, India. The context of the Native American experience has its own particular set of factors that require special attention.

Creswell, (2007) describes narrative research as a process of "re-storying" (p. 56) and, "the qualitative data analysis may be a description of both the story and themes that emerge from it." In addition, the narratives from my classroom will be utilized as a way to analyze and canvass it for the sacred essence that is considered crucial for the classroom experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) outline the criteria and provide a template to include "teacher stories," (p. 96-98). In addition, the usage of family stories is critical to this project. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark on the inclusion of this form of field text. "By family stories, we mean those stories that are handed down across generations about family members and family events" (p. 112).

The complexities of my work contain treasures of information that may not fit into conventional terms; however, they are worth being told. Cynthia Chambers (2009) described how another person's story saved her life. She worked as a teacher in a small

town in the late 1970's amidst financial struggles and racial conflicts. She was a kindergarten teacher that survived on limited funds with three young children. She experienced a turning point in her life after reading Margaret Laurence's (1974) novel, *The Diviners.* This is her reflection on that story:

> That narrative of a woman becoming a writer, in spite of her past and her children, kept me from losing my mind and my children. I have never had the nerve to re-read Laurence's novel; it was hard enough to watch the made-for-television movie years later. In the way of stories, it became mine. That story kept me alive, literally; it saved me from going insane; that story gave me the strength to regain my composure, and go on until I could begin to write my own (p. 78).

Again, I return to one of the most profound American Indian philosophers, Vine Deloria, Jr. He maintains that tribal peoples should not be disregarded as "primitive" or ineffective. "The first step in understanding the alternative worldview of primitive peoples, therefore, is to recognize that they do not derive their beliefs out of 'thin air' but that all beliefs and institutions derive from experience" (p. 355).

The numerous stories I have gathered over the years from many places, people, books, and at times perfect strangers have become a part of me. They are interwoven inside of me as if they are my own. The stories that I have accumulated over the years are a multi-faceted collage of connections. The analysis of my stories is approached by the quest for finding soul in my teaching. My stories, no matter the content continue to be an

inspiration to keep going, and are reminders to honor the sacred in what I do as an educator.

Data Source

The stories for this project are a result of primary documents from my life's work. In particular, photos, journals, reflective writings, family narratives, and classroom vignettes are utilized to provide a portraiture of my journey as an educator in higher education.

Soul in a space of hybridity

My entire life I have fallen "in-between" spaces. I exist between the duality of two cultures, and in a broader context amongst many, many cultures. It is my experiences as a sojourner in territory entrenched in struggle, conflict, competition, and force that I found my sense of soul. Donald (2012) discusses the importance of Métissage as location-based. I have pondered what location I should utilize for this project: my life as an urban American Indian, growing up as an outlander, or perhaps as a half-breed? Regardless, my argument will be to show that my sense of soul became the "location" to which I retreated to make it through life's trials, or other hard times. This is an extremely abstract concept to introduce, and I will weave my narratives to arrive at the place I call (In)Completion. The ending is not finite, and where my story ends leaves an open space.

The Métissage themes for this project are the following: 1). The pedagogy of survival and tenacity; 2). Pedagogy of Resistance and Re-Birth; and 3). Pedagogy of Transcendence. There were four main connectors that I made in and between my

"episodes": culture, inspirations, career, and motherhood. Before I delve into the Métissage vignettes and analysis, the next chapter of this project will present a literature review of the influential theorists on my practice and theoretical underpinnings as an educator. Then, I will interrogate and present the manner in which my teaching and identity have transformed in the subsequent chapters. The concept of soul remains a constant because I consider it to be the binding "force" or tether.

CHAPTER FOUR: MY THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

My stories are a protest to the dominant canon. This is my "authentic" self.

~ Colette M. Polite

Tension between worlds

American Indians have endured a long battle against assimilation by the federal government and Christian missionaries. This is a major historical factor that remains a consistent subject in modern day research on Native American peoples and educational research regarding tribal peoples. I am obligated as a Native American educator to acknowledge the historical significances of colonization on my peoples in this country. It is crucial to recognize the at times very embattled relationship between indigenous tribes and the United States. This is not an extensive description, rather, it serves as a reminder and guidepost. Let's start with a brief history of American Indian education and indigenous philosophy.

According to Vine Deloria (1988) in the epic, *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, he tackled the sordid issues between missionaries and American Indian tribes. He depicted the religion held by many American Indians:

> Indian religion required a personal commitment to act. Holy men relied upon revelations experienced during fasting, sacrifices, and visions. Social in impact, most Indian religious experience was individualistic in origin. Visions defined vocations in this world rather than providing information concerning salvation in the other world (p. 102).

The purpose of one's life was often revealed in a vision quest. The role of visions in the lives of American Indians is still considered sacred, although, their occurrences may not occur with ALL Native Americans. This does not dismiss the importance and more importantly, the sacred meaning, to fulfill one's purpose in life. Meaning and inspiration from vision quests were powerful for that individual. Deloria posits further that indigenous tribes shared similarities with Hebrews of the Old Testament.

> Tribes shared with the Hebrews of the Old Testament the concept of the covenant of the People with God. The majority of tribal names, when translated into English, mean the People, First Men, or Original People. From the belief that the tribe is the People of God to the exclusion of other peoples, it usually follows that tribal customs and religious ordinances are synonymous (p. 103).

In this instance, Deloria shows the power of language to envelope people in a unified fashion. Tribal names are founded in a spiritual connection to the Creator. Secondly, he points out that many names for tribal peoples in North America are analogous to that of ancient tribes in Hebrews[6]. There are parallels between the cultures because of the fusion of cultural beliefs and practices with that of religious and spiritual beliefs. Spiritual and personal lives were not divided. Consequently, the arrival of the Christian religion disrupted the traditional indigenous peoples. A devastating culture clash occurred:

> When the two religious movements came into conflict, the Christian religion was able to overcome tribal beliefs because of its ability to differentiate life into

[6] Genesis 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give**[**c**]** this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, **19** the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, **20** the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, **21** the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.

> segments which were unrelated. When a world view is broken into its component disciplines, these disciplines become things unto themselves and life turns into an unrelated group of categories each with its own morality and ethics (p. 104-105).

The extremely tenuous relationship between tribal peoples and religious officials requires mention because it affects today's contemporary Native American education. While I do not seek to give a highly descriptive analysis of that part of American history, it must be acknowledged. It set the stage for the highly dysfunctional and tragic history that ensued in the United States. It created the colonizer and colonized relationship between the United States and the indigenous tribes/nations that were already there. It is not my desire to debate the validity of indigenous creation stories or to justify the colonized stance. It is my objective to interweave my stories in between these aspects of history because my family was directly affected by the assimilative agenda of the federal government.

Colonization of Education

The work of K.T. Lomawaima (1999) gave a critical analysis of the colonial education practices and policies by the government toward its indigenous population. She provided four major tenets:

(1) Natives were savages and had to be civilized;

(2) Conversion to Christianity was necessary;

(3) Native American communities were placed in subordinate statuses and usually relocated; and

(4) Native Americans were biologically and culturally inferior which justified certain pedagogical strategies.

While these tenets were founded upon false claims and racist doctrines, they were created to justify the racial and cultural superiority of European-Americans. The longstanding effects of the colonial education would be felt for generations to come.

Multiculturalism

As I reflected and contemplated this entire project, I wanted to ensure that the theorists who shaped me, taught me, and eventually nurtured my soul were given their own place in my overall project. Years back, I read educational theorists like Christine Sleeter, James Banks, Herbert Kohl and Jonathon Kozol who introduced me to the world of multicultural education, curriculum, instruction and social justice. They inspired me, and I offer the next sections to honor their work in education and society in general. James Banks offered me a bit of hope for the future as a college student, as I studied his work in anti-racism and multicultural education (1993).

> The main goals of presenting different kinds of knowledge are to help students understand how knowledge is constructed and how it reflects the social context in which it is created and to enable them to develop the understandings and skills needed to become knowledge builders themselves. An important goal of multicultural education is to transform the school curriculum so that students not only learn the knowledge that has been constructed by others, but learn how to critically analyze the knowledge they master and how to construct their own interpretations of the past, present, and future (p. 12).

The curriculum did not have to stay focused on just one culture, that of the dominant culture. My people, so to speak, were not going to only be regarded in the past, as static or monolithic. This gave me direction to start my research into American Indian education into the state of Nebraska.

No wonder I don't exist

The concept of the dominant canon intrigued me as multicultural theorists were engaged in the battle against racism and other forms of discrimination in education. I was a little naïve to the amount of ignorance that people had about Native Americans. As I grew up, I had the luxury of being insulated on the reservation. My community was homogenous in the sense that the majority of residents were Native American (mostly Winnebago tribal members). The "dominant" culture of the area was Winnebago or Ho-Chunk, or just "Indian" in general. I grew up with the term Indian, and ironically, the mascot was the "Indians" for the local school. Of course, it never crossed my mind that the world outside of Winnebago was not as pro-Indian or friendly to Natives as it was on the inside of the world.

Multicultural Education comes to Winnebago, NE

In the late 1980's, a new language program was offered in Winnebago Public Schools. In addition to the regular curriculum, there was going to be Winnebago language lessons. This was a precursor to the momentous language revitalization movement started in the United States among Native American tribes in the 1990's. I always think about the education team members, faculty and administration of those days in school. Who were they? They were very wise for the implementation of that program.

It was a good thing to want to ensure the survival of the Ho-Chunk language. I distinctly recall a feeling of ambivalence about the program. I came home from school and looked forward to seeing my Dad around supper time. I was going to be a good girl and report my school activities. I informed my Dad that the school had started Winnebago language classes (with an air of disdain in my voice). My father (who was white) was not fond of the idea. He had expressed his disdain for such an idea. He didn't know why they would include that in the regular curriculum. I added my ignorant and misguided two cents with the statement: "if I am going to learn a language then it should be my own tribe's- Cheyenne." My father did not respond to my arrogant retort. As I reflect back, many years later, I can dissect the various layers of assimilative school agendas, racism and to some degree the ignorance of my belief system back then. It is striking to look back at my identity as a bi-racial child that grew up outland from her tribal reservation in Nebraska. There are several important factors about my existence that shaped who I was going to become as an educator.

Economic Inequality

When I first read Jonathon Kozol, I was struck by his prose. He wrote about economic disparities and social injustices in urban school districts. His writing touched a part of me, and while unable to visit the places he wrote about, I felt as though I knew his characters. In other ways, his writing shed light on the terrible inequalities in school districts across the US. He brought their stories to light, and not in a commoditized way.

Over two decades ago, Kozol (1991) conducted a comprehensive qualitative study within school districts across the United States in six cities. He provided additional statistical data relevant to his argument, however he interviewed several teachers,

students, and administrators for the majority of the data collection. Kozol outlined the inequality within funding for school districts that established an inherent system of social inequality. For example, Kozol looked at school districts in urban settings like Chicago. Specifically, in the North Lawndale area on the Southside of Chicago, economic disparities were prevalent and unchecked throughout the neighborhood. North Lawndale while once a prosperous neighborhood went through a series of changes that spurred an economic downturn. The neighborhood experienced white flight, and during that exit along went the industries and businesses that sustained the neighborhood. His research introduced me to the facts and stories behind why schools in certain urban areas were impoverished. I applied his work to my own understanding of being educated on the reservation, as I learned about the formula for school funding via property taxes. This information gave me concrete proof that the educational system was not equitable in all parts of the country. It gave me further reason to join teaching to explore ways in which I could fight against inequality.

Post-colonial Influences

Post-colonial theory was introduced to me at the end of my undergraduate career and again in my Masters coursework. Throughout my academic pursuits, I struggled to not become a part of the oppression. Whether I have successfully accomplished that or not, is another story. Regardless, postcolonial scholars like Memmi (1965) exposed me to a new analysis for my life's experiences.

> Revolution. We have seen that colonization materially kills the colonized. It must be added that it kills him spiritually. Colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts men, both colonizers and colonized.

> To live, the colonized needs to do away with colonization. To become a man, he must do away with the colonized being that he has become (p. 151).

The struggle I have faced as a mixed-race Native American educator has been rife with colonialism. The imposition of assimilation is always present. My mother did not pass the Cheyenne language on to her children. Her years in the boarding schools did the job they were intended to do: assimilate her. She did not want her children to experience the prejudice and punishment that she did as a "non-native" English speaker.

Fanon

Frantz Fanon introduced me to the psychology of colonization. His epic book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) educated me more thoroughly on the role of colonization in its international context and the insidious effects it had on people of color. His words on culture and colonization:

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards (p. 18).

As I stated, my mother had to learn English and eventually was sent away from her reservation in Montana to go live with a white family in Washington. Her narrative is discussed in the next chapter in better detail. However, I wanted to foreshadow how Fanon's postcolonial theory gave me a way to start to analyze the narrative of my family.

It revealed the power structures behind assimilation policies and more than revealed the psychological effects that colonization had on its subjects.

Soul Wounds

I have described and will continue to reveal some of my experiences as deep wounds that hit my soul. Teaching with soul is not always happy and introspective. It can be difficult work that takes me back to certain traumas. What exactly is a soul wound in a Native American context? Duran, Duran and Brave Heart (1998) discuss the effects of historical and intergenerational trauma:

> We are not advocating romanticized remembering of the past. Even without the devastation of colonialism, there would have been changes within Native American structures and systems over time. However, those changes would have taken place within the context of cultural change and development. We discuss here some of the subjugated knowledge of the events that led to the present life world of Native Americans and their families. In the process we hope to provide space for reimagining the present—also important component of Native American studies (pp. 61-62).

The analysis that these scholars provided about the effects of colonialism on Native Americans and the long reach of colonization into the future generations of children. It was not just the initial years or simply my grandfather's generation that suffered the effects of it, it was passed on to subsequent generations. The soul wounds that are carried within my family do not have to be the slow poison that kills us off. This explanation gave me additional understanding to re-frame and re-examine my life as a Cheyenne educator/mother/ community advocate.

The theory states that modern day descendants of indigenous tribes and peoples carry around a historical trauma that contributes to psychological and emotional problems. The legacy of colonialism extends everywhere even into our families and very beings. While I do not disagree or care to refute with Duran and Duran, my argument does not care to replicate their work. In fact, some of my narratives will probably hold some of their pioneer research up in ways. Rather, I want to introduce the reader to a relevant part of this work. It is very important to understand past historical and educational occurrences to Native American people, including my own family, so that the specific soul wounds that are within my generation are not misattributed or glossed over.

My struggle to not reinforce colonial practices or perpetuate oppression is recognized by philosophers like Nussbaum (2000) in *Women and Human Development.* Her work validates my concerns and it launches a strong argument as to why universal values should not be abandoned or dismissed completely.

> My project, then, commits itself from the start to making cross-cultural categories. This enterprise is fraught with peril, both intellectual and political. Where these categories come from, it will be asked. And how can they be justified as appropriate ones for lives in which those categories themselves are not explicitly recognized? The suspicion grows that the theorist is imposing something on people who surely have their own ideas of what is right and proper… Isn't all this philosophizing, then, simply one more exercise in colonial or class domination? (p. 35)

The purpose of this argument does not promote that only "one way" regardless of which culture it hails from is the ultimate or "right" perspective. It is imperative as an

indigenous woman and scholar that I uphold intense integrity about my cultural background. In addition, I do not seek to perpetuate any colonialist doctrines or beliefs in this project. Nussbaum provides additional clarification about the role of theory and throws caution to philosophers about the use of it.

> But even if one defends theory as valuable for practice, it may still be problematic to use concepts that originate in one culture to describe and assess realities in another – and all the more problematic if the culture described has been colonized and oppressed by the describer's culture. Such a history does not, of course, imply that the particular describer has colluded with colonization and oppression; she may be a determined critic of colonialism, just as an indigenous woman may be a supporter of it (p. 36).

Eventually, I had to reconcile the fact that I was an educated Native American woman. In some unintentional ways I had joined the ranks of oppressor with my college degree. Yet, I cannot casually dismiss my accomplishment as a simple abandonment of my culture or some way to collude with the enemy. Eventually, as I discovered who I was and as my identity re-configured, I understood that it was possible to do work inside of higher education to work toward change.

Fourth Space for the presence of Soul

Throughout the history of the United States, tribal communities and peoples have managed to survive and retain many cultural practices. I briefly return to Cordova (2007) describes the power relationship between dominant and subordinate cultures:

> A society that has power over another is not in a position to understand the matrix of the society over which it exercises power. The less powerful society's matrix, however, is constantly under attack. Through this attack both matrices are exposed. Two frames of references in the same place will be competitors for "truth" and "validity," as witness the former Yugoslavia where Roman Catholic, Orthodox Catholic, and Muslim inhabit the same area (p.63).

It is imperative that my perspective as a Native American educator is front and center in this inquiry. Thus, this study will scrutinize my classroom practices from a critical perspective to ensure that a Western perspective is not propagated. A perpetuation of the dominant perspective cannot replace the worldview from which I bring to this study. Indigenous perspectives may be enhanced by references to Western philosophy, however, it will not serve justice to the concept of soul to only report and replicate a Western analysis. I seek to offer multiple perspectives in this literature review. It is possible that some of the theorists may seem to compete with one another, however, it is illustrate the constant pressure and push-and-pull that I have experienced as a bi-racial Native American educator.

The concept of the *Indigena* as introduced by Sandy Grande approaches a new way of looking at indigenous issues in modern times. It calls for an additional way to approach indigenous studies and research in such areas.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a philosophical examination of the concept of a teacher's relationship to students via the "fourth space" (Grande, 2004) as a Native American educator. The work of Homi K. Bhabha (1994) is recognized as relevant to

discourses on post-colonial theory, language, and power and identity politics. In particular, he discusses the "third space" of cultural positionality.

> The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation… The implication of this enunciative split for cultural analysis that I especially want to emphasize is its temporal dimension. The splitting of the subject of enunciation destroys the logics of synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge (p. 36).

Bhabha contends that the Third Space is critical as an avenue for authentic expression for those living in post-colonial societies. This is very important, and Grande's work takes it a little further as she argues for a fourth space. Thus, as a Native American scholar, educator and woman, it is important that I examine Native American education with culturally relevant and indigenous perspectives. Sandy Grande (2004) describes *indigena* further below:

> Insofar as strong communities necessitate earnest and inspired leaders the search for 'comfortable modern identities' remains integral to the quest for sovereignty. The proposed construct of *indigena* is intended to guide the search for a theory of subjectivity in a direction that embraces the location of Native peoples in the 'constitutive outside.' Specifically, it claims a distinctively *indigenas* space

> shaped by and through a matrix of legacy, power, and ceremony. In so doing the fourth space of *indigena* stands outside the polarizing debates of essentialism and postmodernism, recognizing that both the timeless and temporal are essential for theorizing the complexity of indigenous realities (p. 175).

"It is reimagined as a transgressive fourth space of both transience and permanence."

This state of transience and permanence implies a contradictory state of being. However, a fourth space affords me to the challenge to examine my own pedagogical practices and teaching practices from a critical indigenous perspective. Finally, this study is couched in the holistic approach to education, which addresses the physical, mental, social and spiritual wholeness of all in the classroom.

I wanted my classroom to become a place for the embodiment of soul. Teaching is at the heart of "who" I am in life. Yet, teaching is not the sole part of my identity. There are many layers to who I am in this life, and the quest for making meaning of that life is important to my practice. In her text, Teaching as Community, bell hooks (2003) captures it best:

> We can't begin to talk about spirituality in education until we talk about what it means to have a life in the spirit. So we are not just teachers when we enter our classrooms, but are teachers in every moment of our lives (p. 158).

For teachers who are members of disenfranchised communities, the task of keeping a sense of self amidst the pressures to conform or "assimilate" to the institution's culture is a harsh reality. While assimilation works for some, there are many others that do not wish to abandon their spirituality at the door, along with their coats. Culture,

identity and spirituality are not cloaks that can be removed for many educators. Further, hooks discusses the cold reality of working in places that do not allow spirituality:

> I am awed by all these people who teach at places where spirituality is accepted. Most of my teaching experiences has been in climates that are totally, utterly, and completely hostile to spirituality. Where colleagues laugh at you if they think that you have some notion of spiritual life. So much of my experience, my teaching practices has been honed in that particularly harsh kind of environment; being spiritual-in-education within an environment that is utterly hostile to that. Not name that hostility but working with it in such a way that the spirit can be present in the midst of it; that fire burns bright without any generation, anything in the environment generating it (p. 162).

In short, had it not been for my own "fire" inside of me; I would have faltered a long time ago in the education system. There were times that I had to keep my spirit hidden from the public eye, but it remained constant and kept me alive.

Learn and Re-Learn

My past learning experiences are critical to my present/contemporary being. Like Dewey, I agree that my past leads to my present in continual growth. In turn, I also consider the past experiences of students as very important information that can possibly reveal learning styles, issues and provide other explanations to guide the present journey. On the other hand, the past is a very powerful set of experiences that can also prove to be very detrimental. I do not take the position that the past should "trap" persons in a way that hinders growth or development. As Dewey notes, the past is not limited to history courses and therefore holds a lot of insight to be harvested from its careful examination.

The curriculum in my courses, my disposition, societal events, group dynamics, and a host of other issues bear an impact on student learning. It is very important that I stay mindful of these various issues so that I keep a critical perspective. Furthermore, it is imperative that I continue to reflect upon experiences and understand that I can gain new or different understandings about them.

Location of Events

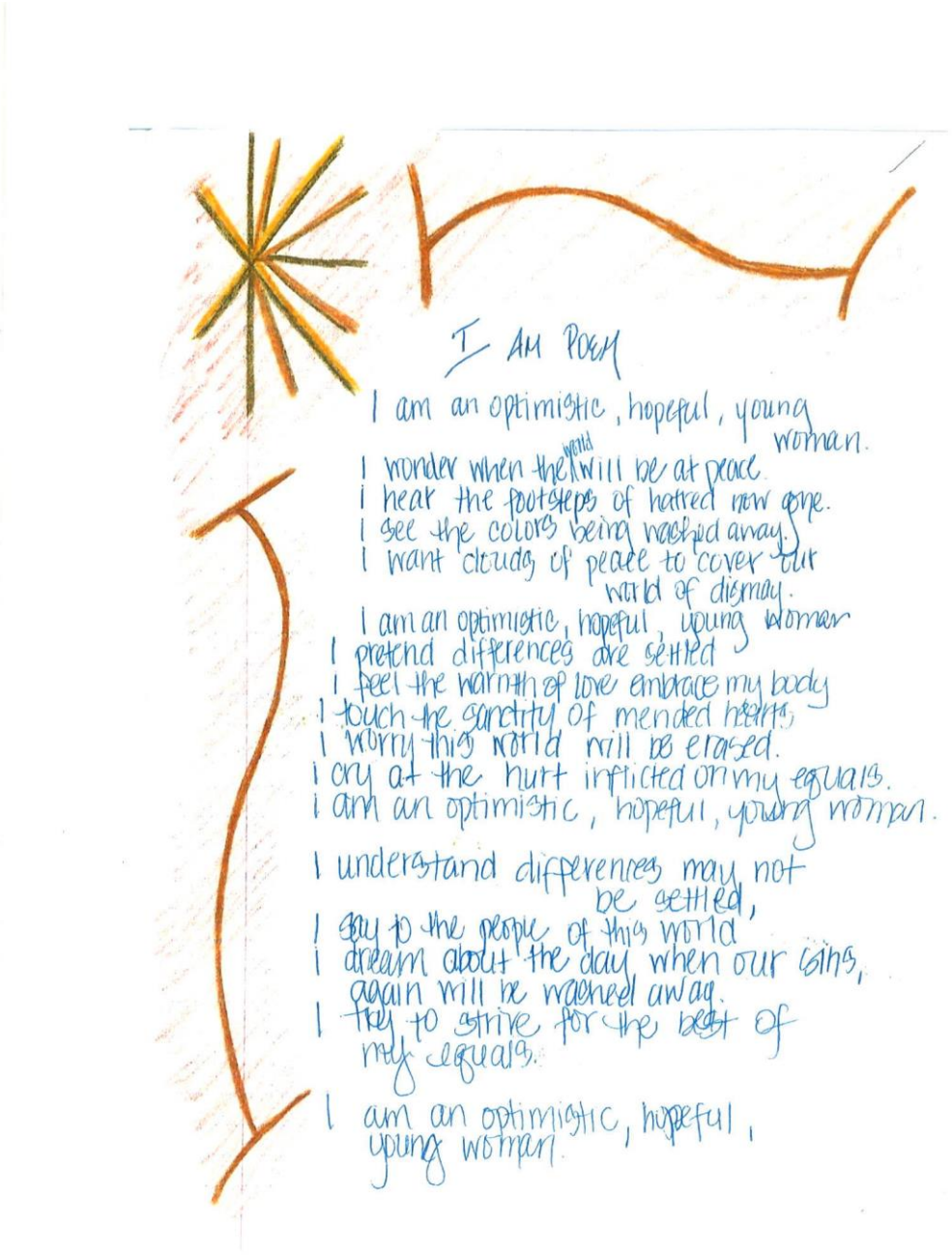
The location of the events that I provide in my métissage are found primarily in the following areas: Winnebago Indian Reservation in Winnebago, NE; Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Busby, MT; and Lincoln, NE.

Context to Métissage

Initially as a novice educator, I set out to make a change in the world and facilitate critical thinking in my students. I valued bringing about change, and was on a quest for it in my classroom. Eventually, I began as an academic counselor in the Student Support Services (SSS) Program. My goal was interlaced between the two roles. In one respect it is an advantage to have more than one position, yet on the other hand it is full of challenges. I have the wonderful experience of teaching, primarily in classrooms with students from racial/ethnic minority, first generation, low-income and/or disabilities backgrounds. This is a rare and unique opportunity in my university because I was able to teach courses in a cohort learning style method. All of my students were either be low-income, first-generation, disabled, or be any number of combinations of those criteria. My role is very unique, and I feel compelled to be protective of my students. My experiences have brought a whole new set of experiences that have yet again challenged me to grow as an educator and scholar.

In particular, I realized over time that my teaching must become authentic and sincere. Let me quickly address what I mean by authenticity and sincerity so I do not casually pass over meaningful and crucial concepts. My teaching had to embody not only who I was as a person (values, beliefs, and worldviews), it had to include the various lives and backgrounds of my students. Authenticity would assist me with the achievement of trust, rapport, honesty, and respect in my classroom; and in between myself and students. My approach to my work could not be a shallow reproduction of replication of somebody else's style. My students could not become a casualty to my identity work or pedagogical practices. Finally, it was about coming to an understanding that who I am (and was) would be influenced by my mentors and educational theorists like Dewey and all of the others that I previously discussed. I realized it was my responsibility and it was my path to trek. As I approach the final chapters of this project, a major realization came over me. As I work toward new awareness of self, the development of my own understanding and contribution to educational research, I understand the value of not shutting off any opportunities for growth and learning. My stories can be re-examined, or in line with Métissage, a re-storying of my path as an educator.

Métissage: Understanding my Self, through my stories



I Am Poem

I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.
I wonder when the world will be at peace.
I hear the footsteps of hatred now gone.
I see the colors being washed away.
I want clouds of peace to cover our world of dismay.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman
I pretend differences are settled
I feel the warmth of love embrace my body
I touch the sanctity of mended hearts,
I worry this world will be erased.
I cry at the hurt inflicted on my equals.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.
I understand differences may not be settled,
I say to the people of this world
I dream about the day when our sins, again will be washed away.
I try to strive for the best of my equals.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.

A poem I wrote during the summer before my freshman year in college. It is full of hope, and has stayed with me throughout all of these years.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Métissage One: Pedagogy of Survival and Tenacity

Soul is the essence of identity.

As I weave the experiences, I came to the realization that I's my soul that kept me alive.

My instincts and emotions were definitely a part of the type of education that I received at a young age. I learned to rely and depend on those primal instincts. I honed them and used them to inform my everyday life. Although they were in some ways a result of trauma in my life, I did not shy away from my instincts. In other more positive ways, my instincts were encouraged and ever-present in my culture and heritage. I began to rely on them. Hence, my instincts were not shelved away and reserved for extreme circumstances of "fight or flight." They became a vital part of my story. I consider the usage of instincts to be a form of getting in touch with one's soul. How did instincts guide me through? They became a reliable source for me to navigate my path. I consider instincts as inter-related and inter-dependent on intelligence. I do not separate intellect from instincts, for me, they work in harmony to guide my life. Instincts are a solid part of my emotional intelligence in teaching.

In Upheavals of Thought, Nussbaum (2001) asserts that emotions are not primitive and undeserving of credence and acknowledgement. "Nonetheless, I shall argue that emotions involve thought of an object combined with thought of the object's salience of importance; in that sense, they always involve appraisal or evaluation," (p. 23). Nussbaum delivers a strong message about emotions: they are not trivial or

thoughtless. She notes that emotions aren't random occurrences; rather, they are directed at something- an object (p. 27). Emotions as an intelligence is extremely relevant to my position as an educator and advocate. I stand firmly on the belief that emotions are indeed another form of intelligence.

Further, the instincts and emotions that I described earlier, served as a type of radar for me to navigate the complicated and often times hostile terrains of being a "half-breed" or a bi-racial child as "they" say today. In addition, the fond memories that I hold from my life are packed full of emotions. Each vivid memory brings back a swell of emotions that I cannot paint near accurately enough to show their depth and complexity. Nussbaum (2001) describes the relationship that a person has between emotions and the intended objects: "Their aboutness is more internal, and embodies a way of seeing," (p. 27). This statement introduces an alternative notion about emotions, that they are not happenstance or unguided attacks at some random target.

> Once again, we should insist that aboutness is part of the emotions' identity. What distinguishes fear from hope, fear from grief, and love from hate – is not so much the identity of the object, which might not change, but the way in which the object is seen, (p. 28).

This "way of seeing" is the manner in which I approach my work toward ending oppressions and inequalities in education. The anger and resentment I carried toward the racism I endured and witnessed became a formidable force to guide me. This might sound contradictory, however, if we assume that Nussbaum is accurate in her assertion then this is quite feasible. Thus, my strong feelings of anger and passion for change were

relevant and indeed helpful. I explored my identity throughout my college degree. Without knowing it, I took a long hard gaze back at my upbringing to examine my childhood. My childhood is filled with strong emotional memories. There were a lot of good things and bad things that happened to me. A simplistic analysis is not my objective. I intend to provide a portrait of how my childhood shaped who I am as an educator today.

The little nudges that I feel when somebody's words do not match with their actions. I call them my instincts, a gut feeling that something is off.

In my early years as an educator, I struggled with the balancing act between theory and practice. As a novice educator, I began to drift away from my initial world experiences, which was to rely on my instincts. I dove into my education, and soaked up the facts, logic, theorists and philosophical approaches. Despite my eager attempts, I was thrust into this after place of being taken from a state of safety and comfort in my theories, facts and "knowledge" into a discombobulated place when I engaged with my practice, my craft. This is not to discredit theories or philosophies; rather, my point is to reveal the manner in which they were only a part of the picture or story of who I would become as an educator. It is within those early experiences that I started to re-examine my life, my purpose. As Palmer (2003) called for us to pursue our soul's calling, I had to attend to my own experiences that forced me to scrutinize, re-arrange and re-search who I was called to be.

As Hassebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo outline in Life Writing (2009) the significance of childhood on this type of writing. The stories begin in the childhood.

> Wherever sojourning might (or might not) lead, it always begins with childhood. Cixous (1993) claims that "most poets are saved children: they are people who have kept their childhood alive… (p. 66)". As life writers who research childhood (our own and others), we are convinced that even though thinking ahead is demanding, perhaps it is just as demanding to look back, to embrace the remembered stories of childhood, and especially to seek other possibilities for remembering. As Heraclitus (2001) recommends: "Applicants for wisdom, do what I have done: inquire within (p. 51)." This inquiring within, this sojourning in the inner worlds of memory and imagination and dreams will always pose enormous challenges (p. 100).

An inquiry within me is what I seek to do within the narratives that I share with the reader. Further, this internal inquiry is to reach others. I share my stories and the analyses of such to reveal my path as an educator. The significance of each story provides a braid, a snapshot of the bigger collage that is my life story. The life story of an educator that rose above challenges and hardships to arrive at pedagogy of transcendence. However, before I could understand my place in this world, or truly appreciate the gifts and the spirit of my teaching; I had to struggle. My initial stories are more than just "memoirs". Norman (2009) writes about her dissertation process that was outside of the traditional approach to research. Her dissertation challenges the orthodoxy of educational research. She provides writing that moves in and out of tense, time and incorporates artistic expression. The inclusion of artistic expressions, auto-narratives, and reflections on feminist theorists inform my own self-inquiry.

> But there is a price to pay for such work. In challenging the orthodoxies, the orthodoxies also challenge us. I was asked: What conclusions did you arrive at in your study? I replied: I came to the conclusion that I have no conclusions, that I have more questions than answers, that in the gaps and fissures and fractures that exist between the lines of my postmodern text, there are spaces where ambiguity flourishes (p. 129).

Her work like many others, reminds me to attend not only to my present being in education, both as scholar and teacher, but to also re-examine my own past. And, it is with great caution and awareness that I traverse the past. It is in the spirit of Dewey (1938) that I seek to re-connect with my past.

Simpkins (2011) in her Métissage dissertation discusses the post-positivistic nature of this research. Narrative Métissage is not meant to replicate traditional research.

> The autobiographical narratives bring to light how each of us constructs our own reality; however the weaving and performing of the Métissage speaks to the idea that reality is collectively constructed and that truth is constructed in an ongoing process of interaction with others. The performance of Métissage assumes that knowledge is embodied and attuned to emotion. Narrative Métissage assumes that research should be transformative. It should lead to a better understanding of the self and others and of the world we live in (p. 34).

Simpkins' dissertation project focused on her experiences as an educator in Kurdistan. Her beautiful dissertation revealed the narratives of her experiences and those of some of

her students. Her work was very informative to my own Métissage dissertation. It was a guiding example as I weave my own narratives to arrive at the points that I seek to make.

My first theme is titled: pedagogy of tenacity. The trauma and struggles I endured as a youngster made me who I am today.

In her book chapter, Cooper (2009) makes a case for the "emotionality and vulnerability" in educational research. Her work guides me as a researcher in higher education because she explains the significance of life events and the influence they had in my life. Her own research describes her little brother that was epileptic. Cooper's brother, Michael, was placed into an institution where he remained. This life event changed her forever. She could not understand the injustice from a cognitive or intellectual perspective (until later), but her brief narrative certainly showed the emotional education that she received when her brother was placed in that place. Her work reveals and informs my own project.

> Although my vantage-points are complex and dynamic, always shifting as I continue, they serve as a compass, situating and guiding not only why I write about what I do, but also what and how I write. Looking back over my life, I believe this experience [her little brother's institutionalization] and others like it for other people require a certain "self-understanding" or "re-searching" which acknowledges the permanent enduring presence of the past (p. 185-186).

The initial stories that I share are like a compass to my own life. Cooper's argument for the acknowledgement and inclusion of "emotionally-charged" events is central to my first Métissage theme. Specifically, she maintains that auto-biographies, narratives or life

events cannot be relegated to the confines of triviality and as peripheral to educational research.

> It is research of this nature that promises to shed light on little-known but taken-for-granted issues of human nature. Human emotions cannot be quantified, but they can be highlighted and focused upon through "autobiographical writing" informed by hermeneutic perspectives (p. 194).

This is an inquiry of self, and my life story is full of emotionally charged events and experiences. I made deliberate selections to illuminate what I consider to be central to my person- my essence rooted in soul. As I started this project, I told the tale of my grandmother's belief on soul. For a Cheyenne, your soul was inextricably tied to your existence and without it, you perish. This is a journey into times in my life that I rose above and infused the critical lessons as a way to lay the course for my career as an educator in higher education.

Métissage One: Pedagogy of Survival and Tenacity

The world we live in is not perfect. That is an obvious fact. Our everyday being is a struggle. We are tested throughout the time we are here. ~ July 1994

My education on the beloved reservation[7] inspired me to work toward social change. A couple of weeks after my high school graduation, a university representative traveled to the reservation to transplant me to the university. This was the era of providing academic bridge programs for students of color as they entered four-year

[7] Reservation refers to the land set aside for American Indians tribes and nations, and is a complicated issue in itself.

universities. I was very excited and completely unprepared for the experiences I would come up against, like many young college students. Despite it all, a commitment to my education was forged from deep inside. My resiliency was grounded in strength, perseverance and pride. The beginning of my story as a Native American educator and community advocate started on that first day I set foot on campus.

The disconnection between personal lives and professional lives was unnatural as a young student college and remains so today as a Native American educator. My tribal worldviews also sustain a core belief that a person never gives up. So, despite any struggles I faced I could not turn back. Those initial days on campus were full of excitement and joys, and intermixed within those experiences was the nagging feeling that my old life was being left behind. My identity would begin to go through a transformation as I walked in a different world. Deloria (2001) elaborates on the serious tension between indigenous ways of knowing and Western metaphysics:

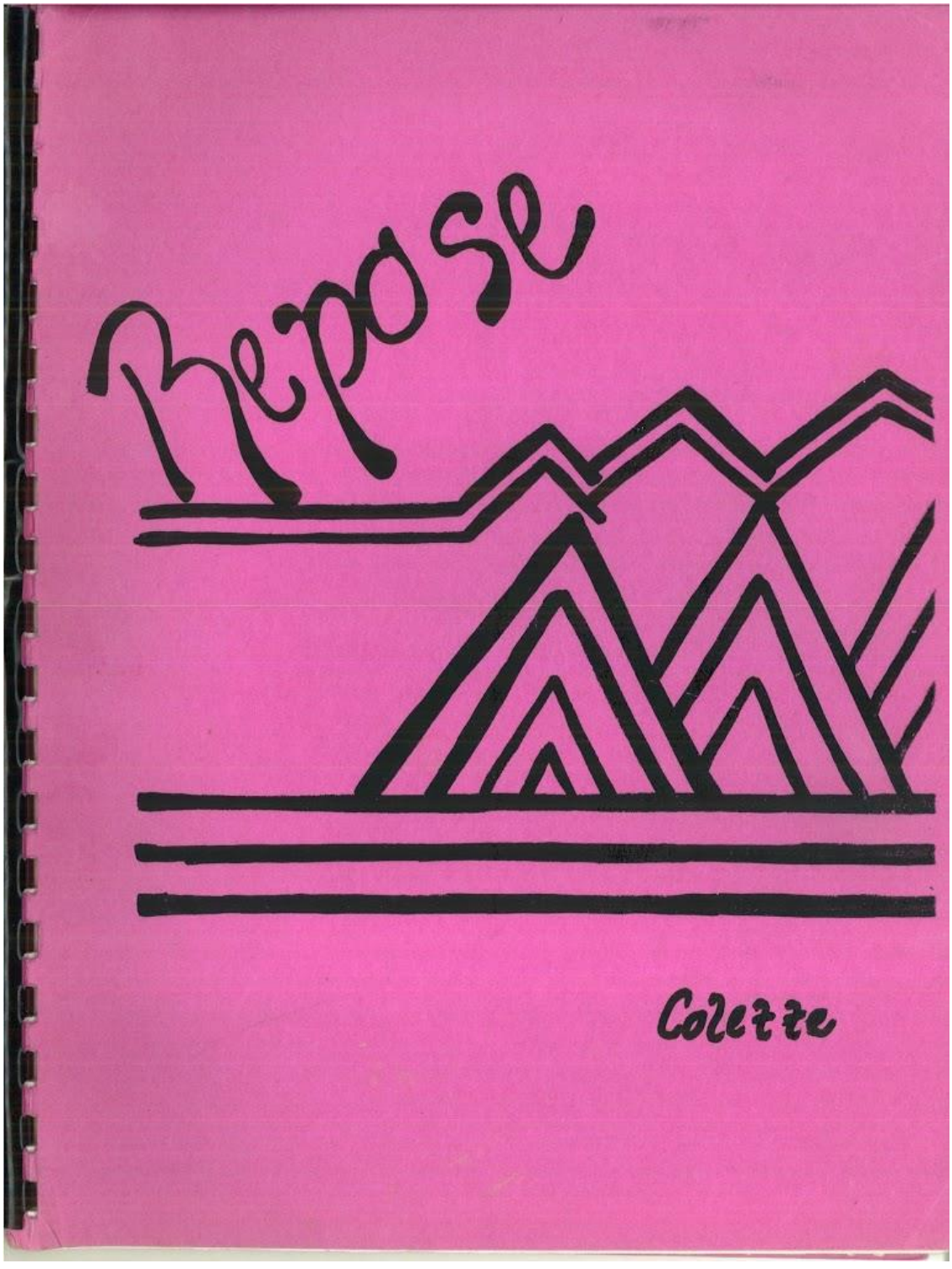
> Indian students today are confronted with the monolith of Western science when they leave the reservation to attend college. In most introductory courses their culture and traditions are derided as mere remnants of a superstitious, stone-age mentality that could not understand or distinguish between the simplest of propositions. Additionally, they are taught that science is an objective and precise task performed by specialists who carefully weigh the propositions that come before them. Nothing could be further from the truth (p. 3).

I could not understand why my personal beliefs and views were being denied. It was as though I had to become robotic and cut off a part of my existence. I wanted my cultural perspective to be acknowledged. There were several incidents that I longed for my home.

Even though I was not a member of the Winnebago tribe, I grew up there. I considered it my home. It wasn't until I began to study American Indian scholarship, history and research that I realized I was a "transplant Indian.[8]" Regardless of my technical status, the reservation was my home. I became an outlander when I went off to college in the urban setting. In a way, it was like I became a sojourner in a foreign world. I grew up on a farm, and I was intimately tied to the land. The land or countryside I was raised in was a part of me. The land around Lincoln was unfamiliar to me, flat and with very little trees. It was a time of adjustment to the urban lifestyle, on top of the many other identity issues that I faced for being the age I was.

The new land I would traverse would set me for some incredible experiences. My determination to secure a college degree and "make it" off of the reservation was strong. The journey I walked to get to where I am today was filled with accomplishment, but it wasn't until I stopped and re-visited those times that I understood the tenacity, perseverance and ability to survive that I hold within myself.

[8] An outdated term to identify Native Americans that grow up on a reservation different than their tribal homelands.


Repose
Colette

Episode One: Repose

The word "repose" struck me as read back through old writings and pieces of work that I did while a youngster. For years I carried around this definition of what I thought the word meant. Repose. I spent an afternoon re-examining that word. Repose as defined by Merriam-Webster's website: a natural periodic loss of consciousness during which the body restores itself. I started on a trek to gain knowledge, seek out answers and embark on a major quest for learning. I reflected back on my journey in higher education: first as a student, next as a novice educator, and now as a professional. Yet, as I read back through my old journals and writings, a part of me could not believe how insightful I was at my tender age of 18 years old. I drafted an essay which detailed the family issues and fighting I endured my senior year of high school. The title of the piece is "A Struggle". My actual writing reflects my age and the grammar was not exemplary. However, it is not the mechanics of my paper that struck me. Toward the end of the essay, I discussed the sad day of my high school graduation. My father had come to support me, and a host of other family members. I gave my Salutatorian speech, and was eager and excited with my friends and peers. A caption from my reflective essay:

> I somehow got through this time and was prepared to graduate. I was going to use my special day to mend fences. Even though I thoroughly resented my mother, I wanted her to see me walk across that stage. My mother knew I wanted her to come, so I assumed she would love to come. Throughout the ceremony, I

> scanned the audience. I didn't see her. When the time came for my mother to be there, she wasn't. (July 1994).

As an adult, I can recall the shame and embarrassment that I felt when my mother did not come to my special day. She and my father were separated and at the beginning of their divorce. It is unfortunate that the differences were not set aside for me, but that is of no consequence today. This segment of my life revealed something to me that I didn't realize was present quite a while ago. Tenacity. It is not the type of offense or heartbreak that sticks out to me. It is the fact that I overcame that suffering and event at the time. I passed through that time and persevered past the pessimism to get over the next step. My reflections back on that time period are distant memories, and I think it is amazing that I was able to forgive my parents, moreover my mother, so that I did not carry a grudge. As I've made the argument for, the emotionally charged childhood events we go through make a lasting impression upon our lives. It is within those experiences that our souls are tested.

Episode Two: Blood Quantum

My attention to non-verbal communication and listening to my instincts were (and are) valuable in the culture of which I grew up. I could feel or "sense" the tension or inconsistencies between what I was being told by people and what their bodies or non-verbal cues were telling me. Concurrently, there were many misconceptions about my homeland and me for not being a "full-blood". I was challenged and expected to validate my identity for others. My "self" was appropriated by others to satisfy their definition of who I was or what I should look like. Needless to say, I was thrust into an educational

institution that did not rely upon instincts. At the time, I was also unaware of the identity politics war that ensued in the post-modern era of higher education, (Omni & Winant, 1994). What is race? I was an angry young Native American woman with passion and zeal to effect change in racial, cultural, educational and gender studies. The treatment and brutal histories of American Indian peoples in this country were a type of fuel for my passion to de-mystify the romantic accounts of Native Americans in textbooks or novels.

I wanted to explore the complexities and layers in life. My joys and struggles as both a student and later as an educator via classroom stories reveal the complexities and dangers when systems try to exclude parts of our identities. The complexities not only in my classroom, but in the lives of my students bear a significant impact on my work. It is imperative that I continue to avoid the danger of binaries. Further, I assert that other educators must examine and re-examine the layers and intersections that students bring with them into the classroom.

My reflection on the importance of my identity has remained an organic process rooted within social justice. Mihesuah (1999) explores the diversity within the topic of American Indian identity. She describes the "complicated" task of this topic and carefully articulates the impacts that political, social, and economic forces have on identities of Native Americans. Mihesuah adapts William Cross' "life stages" model for African American identity to the American Indian experience. Ultimately, her essay determines that Native American identity has to be articulated by themselves for themselves. It was a struggle for me to understand my identity as a young Cheyenne woman. I received sage advice from both of my parents. An excerpt from an essay I titled Words of Truth:

> My mother used to talk to me in such a manner that I knew she was somehow preparing me for or perhaps she was warning me. She would say, "You are going to have to learn how to survive in both worlds." When she told me this it sent me into a deep thought process. I finally came to the conclusion that her words held two meanings for me. Indians themselves have to adapt and I quickly figured that, but I realized that I also had to adapt to the fact that I was a half breed. My father also gave me words of wisdom which have stayed within my heart and soul since the day he first said them. My dad strongly believed in these words. He always told me that "blood is thicker than water." "Remember that," he used to say, "because some day you're gonna need to depend on your blood."

Imagine being a child and given these messages. The symbolism of "blood" in my life would carry on many meanings. My existence was determined by "blood." My degree of blood quantum, my non blood ties to my friends in the Winnebago community, my mixed-blood status and the belief that family ties were sacred. But, there were many times that the sage advice from both of parents betrayed me. My own "blood" mother did not attend my graduation. Early in my life, a blood relative abused me. As a child and yet still as a teenager I could not completely fathom and understand the complexities of who I was or would become. My Native identity was forged in the various meaning of blood.

Red vs. White

The treatment and brutal histories of American Indian peoples in this country were a type of fuel for my passion to de-mystify the romantic accounts of Native Americans in textbooks or novels. Despite the attempts by others to inquire about my background with polite questions like, 'what are you?' I developed my own identity amidst the racial and gender conflicts. I return to some of my earlier journal writings as a first-year student at a Midwestern university[9]:

> There are those of us who are in the middle, in between two worlds of conflicting interest. I guess we are by-products of rebellion against supremacy. Okay? Or, would one go toward an argument of love? Does Love conquer all? Is it blind in a world of distinct colors? Are we natural products of love? Perhaps. In the middle, think about it. I possess traits from both of my parents. I have "powers" given to me from both worlds. I am supposed to fuse both, confusing as they (worlds) may be- into one being, my being, and (Speaking of Half-Breed, September 1994).

As I reflect back on the fervor in my words, I work to recall the memories that inspired me. My words dwelled on emotions, and feelings and were central to my state of being. I wanted to express complicated feelings. As I gaze backwards, it is apparent that I was thrust into an unnatural and binary existence. The legacy of colonialism extends into the

[9] The tendency to make Native Americans into a monolithic sub-category of America is inappropriate. Thus, it is critical to state that my experiences as a Northern Cheyenne educator in a university are not the same for all Native American women.

bowels of the university, and I was underprepared for the assumptions and stereotypes about Native Americans. At the time, I did not have the sophisticated language to articulate how categorization and limitations via binaries were assaults on my existence.

On top of the identity struggle I endured, I had to come to terms with a dark secret in my past. The following poem was written as a result:

Untitled (subject known)

She runs away from her pain
A pain which violated what was sacred to her.
That innocence stolen from her soul.
I see her running.
She runs like a deer through the trees.
Her pace is swift.
She runs hard and far to escape that thief.
I think back and look at the seed of her pain, yet my mind is blocked.
What keeps my memories from taking root?
Then, I see her.
I see why she is running.
Faster, faster – I follow, holler at her.
"I understand now! I know your pain!"
But, she is not ready to look in the mirror.
Now is the time for moving forward…
Remembering is for later.
She told me she will run forever.

As I look back, I see the deer disappear into the trees.

The pain that I endured as young child did not consume me. I strived and was determined to not give in to the pain, mental anguish or darkness of which it originated.

Episode Three: What you call grit, I call a way of life

Grit

There's a new catchy phrase going around in Student Affairs nowadays --"grit." Students need to get some "grit", so they can become more independent. I looked at my boss in a peculiar way as she described this trendsetting concept to me. She had attended a meeting in which this concept was discussed. She told me, "I thought of you, Colette, as they described what it meant [grit]." I listened to her, but as I walked away, I chuckled to myself. My life must be a testament to Nietzsche's paraphrased (overused) however, legendary words: "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger."

Grit as a "non-cognitive" trait- what does that mean? There are several research studies around this concept. There are books to assist teachers with the preparation of their students for the "real world." Hoerr (2013) published a book that defines grit as: tenacity, perseverance, and the ability to never give up (p. 1). This sounds familiar to me, already. Other social psychologists and researchers (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007) have created the "grit scale" and defined grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 1087). As I engage the research on grit, I realize that it is something that has been inside of me throughout my life. I consider it as a part of my

soul. The image of the poem in the beginning of this chapter signifies the hope and optimism that I had for society.

[A poem I wrote in my first year as an undergraduate. (Circa 1994)]

I Am Poem

I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.
I wonder when the world will be at peace.
I hear the footsteps of hatred now gone.
I see the colors being washed away.
I want clouds of peace to cover our world of dismay.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.
I pretend differences are settled.
I feel the warmth of love embrace my body.
I touch the sanctity of mended hearts.
I worry this world will be erased.
I cry at the hurt inflicted on my equals.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.
I understand differences may not be settled,
I say to people of this world.
I dream about the day when our sins
Again will be washed away.
I try to strive for the best of my equals.
I am an optimistic, hopeful, young woman.

As an educator, I have strived to embody survival, perseverance and tenacity in order to be re-born and resist the temptation to give up and return to a broken family life-defeated. My life experiences and struggles provided serious roadblocks, but I was not going to regress and sink into the oblivion of darkness that seemed to be lingering around me. The true test of my character came when I faced my own death. The year was 1996, and I was the tender age of 19 years old. I was in my second year of college and on a visit back home to visit my family, I almost fell victim to dysfunction, consequences of broken families, and bigotry.

> *Unfortunately for me, I was placed right in the middle between my Dad's love affair and my Mother's disdain for his behavior. It was the classic, textbook example of why divorced parents should not place the "kids" in the middle of a fight. There was going to be a pricey consequence to their behavior and I would be it.*
>
> *One fateful night (February 17, 1996), I was back home from college for a visit. I decided to confront my Dad about his "behavior" and put my nose where it didn't belong- his romantic life. This didn't go well for me. He decided the best way for me to "learn" my place would be for him to beat it out of me. My dad turned the tables on me and questioned me about whom I was dating while in school. He didn't care for my inter-racial dating and was going to take me out West of town (remote, dark, gravel roads) and beat the *&^$ of me. I was terrified and he would not slow down the pickup. It was like being in a movie, and he was possessed by something evil. His rage had consumed him. At the same time, I was also furious and refused to be beaten just because of whom I loved. It was*

> *insulting and scary all at the same time= which means CRAZY!!! The last turn before my impending beat down I decided to make a jump at it. My Dad slowed his truck down to turn and I tried to desperately escape his vehicle, which I managed to do. I woke up four days later in ICU. My family was scared, divided and prepared for me to die. I vividly recall the excruciating pain to this day. It felt like spikes were being driven into my skull, I suffered a subdural hematoma and underwent 2 brain surgeries. Fortunately, I survived that perilous and terrifying experience. I was very vulnerable in the hospital and had to rely on the person, my Dad, to take care of me during my recovery.*

Fortunately, I was able to resume my studies at college. At a very costly price, I tried to re-enter my courses at the university. During that spring semester, I was able to pass couple of courses, but failed the remaining classes. Some might consider it coincidental, but one of the courses that I failed was taught by a professor that would later become my PhD program advisor. I was able to re-take that course at a later semester and passed it with flying colors. (A course that I would later teach.) It is interesting how the universe sends us into different experiences and then sometimes brings us back full circle.

Episode Four: I Am Not Your Statistic

A couple of years ago, I gave a speech to young mothers at a local conference. The conference was designed to assist single moms that were not done with high school or were in college. I accepted the invitation to "share my story", and spent a couple of days in meditation and devoted serious thinking to my future endeavor. What should I

say? How much should I share? The words I shared with those young ladies came from the very core of me- my heart and soul. The following excerpts reveal my "grit."

> The tile of my speech is "I Am Not Your Statistic!" Those words describe the way in which I come here before each of you today as a peer, colleague, Sister, and as a "Single Mom." Single Mom: those two words have shaped my life in more ways that I can begin to count. Single Mom: those two words still cause psychological and emotional ripple effects in my life. As I reflected back through time to prepare for this speech, I took quite the emotional journey to arrive at the words I share with you today. I want to share with you some things about me. Stories are very powerful and sacred gifts that we can share with another as humans, as women, as sisters and brothers in this world...
>
> Amongst the many benefits of stories, I want to share with you mine about my road as a single Mom. And to that end, "I never was and will never be just another statistic!"
>
> Single Mom: those two words can sometimes represent pathology in our society. It is a constructed term in society to demonize and relegate an unmarried woman to the ranks of "less than." I am not here to reinforce that patriarchal and insulting point of view. Rather, I am going to explain to you how a wide array of competing yet ironically divine variables hurled me into a journey of which changed my life forever…
>
> By the end of second semester, I was feeling terrible and knew I could be pregnant. I took an at home test and confirmed that I was going to be a

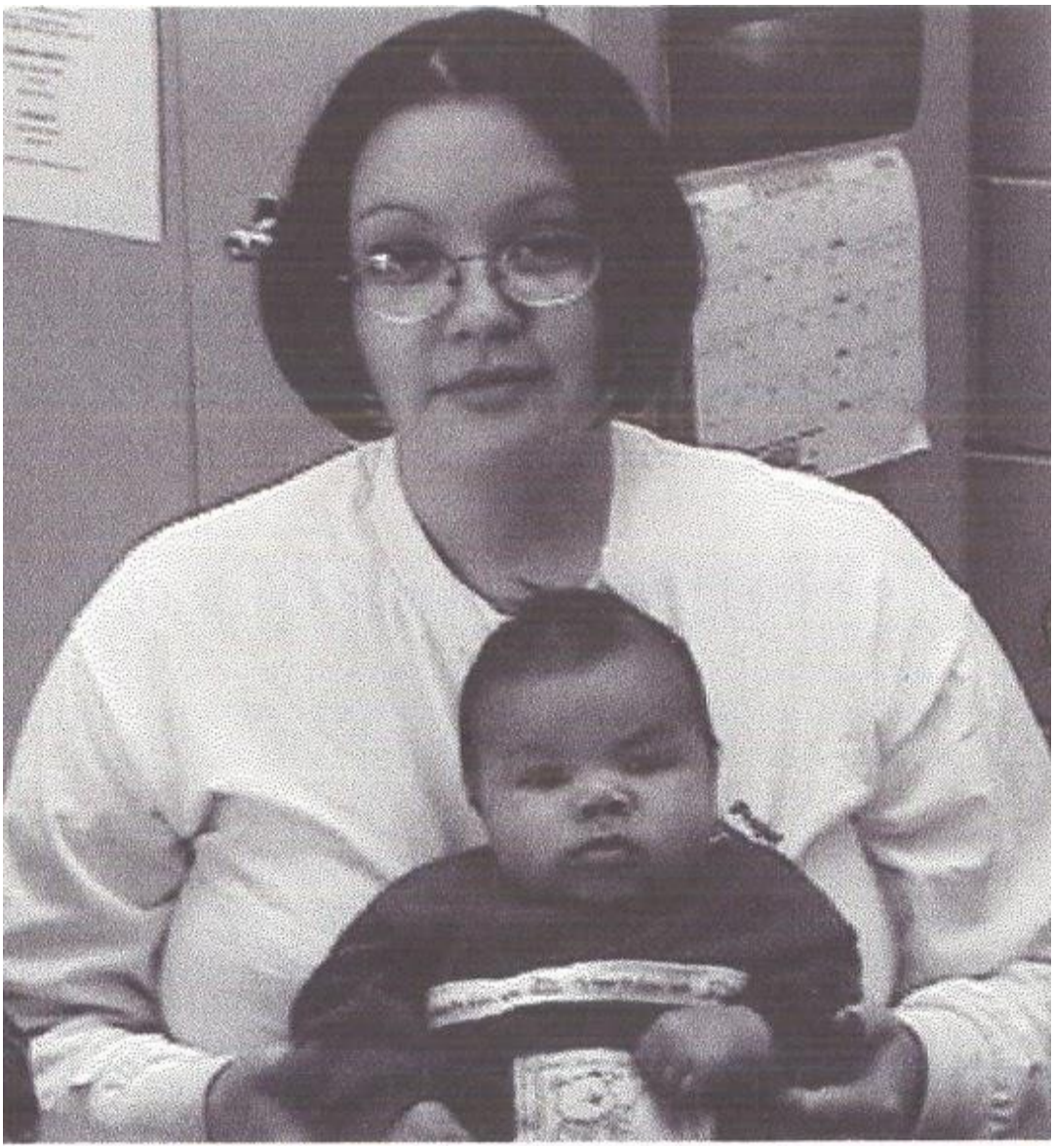
Mom. My unborn child and I earned a new label from society: "Unplanned pregnancy" I remember being asked that question by the OB/GYN. I am confident that he "didn't intend" to sound patronizing or condescending, but he was and I quickly learned that all about the negativity associated with being a young, unwed and ethnic pregnant woman.

I shared my news with a select few at college; of course I thought I could trust my precious news to be sacred. But soon, I was at the heart of many rumors and conversations. Many individuals expressed their disappointment in me, and much to my chagrin, one of my role models at the Multicultural Affairs Office declared that I was going to end up a "Statistic." My life started to change in ways that I was totally unprepared for.

I look back on those early months and I want to tell you that my boyfriend wanted our baby. I want to tell you that, but that would be a lie. Now don't get me wrong, he certainly loves and wants our teenager son today. But, he was young and scared and not quite there in the early days. To borrow some poignant words from Ntozake Shange's classic choreopoem For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf: "You were always inconsistent, doin something & then bein sorry, beatin my heart to death, talkin bout you sorry."

I was tired, sick and without any energy. But, I had to figure out a way to make my rent and get ready to bring a child into this world. I got lucky and was offered an entry level position at the Indian Center. I did not have a working car, but I was determined to keep my new job as a receptionist. I would get up early to catch the bus from my crummy apartment to Downtown. I didn't know how to ride the bus the rest of the way so I walked the remaining mile and a half to the Center. I walked by the university campus, from which I was academically dismissed. Since it was so early in my pregnancy, I was extremely nauseous and sick in the morning. Frequently I had to stop along the way to vomit and/or dry heave.

But I did it; I was determined to be gainfully employed. I walked to work despite the morning sickness. I could have given up, but the life growing in my belly gave me a new perspective on life.



[A picture of Chase (3 mos.) and me at the Indian Center, Inc. February 1998.]

I reared my precious little baby to the best of my ability. I was on unpaid maternity leave which only lasted two weeks. I couldn't afford to go without a paycheck so I returned to work in the winter with my newborn baby in tow. I took Chase with me to work and he sat on the receptionist

> desk with me as I performed my duties. Chase's first Christmas was a lean one, but I didn't care since we were all together as a family. My boyfriend and I had no money for an elaborate Christmas dinner, so we settled for a meager meal. The stress of being new parents, terribly poor along with our dysfunctional relationship took its toll on my boyfriend. So what did he do? He "took a break" from us. He left in January and moved in with his best friend from high school back in the city he grew up in. I was alone, car-less, broke and caring for a 2 month old baby in the dead of winter. It certainly was a test of character. Yet again, there I was a single mom.

As I reflect back on my days as an undergraduate, fledgling young mother, and an impoverished but determined Cheyenne woman, I believe I had "grit". The question remains, how do I translate these experiences coupled with various forms of knowledge into meaningful ways. How did this episode in my life affect my teaching?

My early experiences taught me the priceless lessons of hope and faith. A hopeless life is not worth living at all, and despite the fact that I became a young mother, my little baby gave me the precious gift of restored hope. Another excerpt from my speech:

> My family had disowned me by that point in time, so I truly was alone. I didn't have my Mom or Sisters with me as I faced one of the toughest yet greatest times in my life.

> On November 26th 1997 I gave birth to my son, Chase. I called him (and still do) my blessing. That little baby boy saved my life as far as I was concerned. Even though the vast majority of my family didn't approve of my pregnancy, I shudder to think where my Life could have ended up without him. I was a new Mommy, and I was ready to protect, love and take care of my beloved baby.

The pedagogy of hope that I gained from the birth of my child provided a renewed source of living. I was just going through the motions beforehand, and did anything I could to anesthetize the pain and abuse I endured as a child. I soon found that the avoidance of anger, pain and trauma does not work. If you don't deal with it (trauma), then it will deal with you.

Pedagogy of Hope

Freire (1992) dared to argue for the underprivileged classes and groups in education. Years after his famous and widely regarded *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he wrote an additional text: *Pedagogy of Hope*. Despite the inhumane and inconceivable corruption at work in his home country of Brazil, he advocated for hope in education and for education systems to be transformed throughout the world. However, he was careful to warn against the sole reliance of hope to transform systems of oppression. Freire asserted:

> The ideas that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of *naiveté*, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach,

> is a frivolous illusion. To attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle, is tantamount to denying that struggle one of its mainstays. The essential thing, as I maintain later on, is this: hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice. As an ontological need, hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness. That is why there is no hope in sheer hopefulness. The hoped-for is not attained by dint of raw hoping; just to hope is to hope in vain (p.2).

The little child brought me more gifts and intangible rewards than anything else in life at the time. My own sense of hope restored, I began my trek to attain the formal education I would need to enter a career field in higher education. The priceless gift of motherhood amidst brought into focus my life and added another layer to my identity. This additional role in my life became intertwined with my goals. The pivotal lesson from my narrative is quite simple. The resiliency that existed inside of me would carry me through like an extraordinary, invisible force. The part I did not understand yet was the series of traumatic events that led up to my motherhood were not going to hold me back. Rather, I gained this acute consciousness of the direction in which I should commit my life. I did not just want to teach, I wanted to genuinely make a difference. Teaching became a part of my soul.

Métissage Two: Pedagogy of Resistance and Re-Birth

My first encounter with the reality of theory and practice came early on in my teaching career with moments that challenged me to adapt. The one major factor in my journey as an educator has been my growth and development of my own identity. I do not

intend to convince the reader that my journey has somehow "arrived" or is complete, rather it's critical that I start years ago and recognize my own realization that my journey is a process of growth and discovery.

> Essentially, the courses, the theories, the pedagogical practices that I have learned have been my best allies at times and at others have been as far away as the Sea of Tranquility. My relationship with theorists or these elusive bodies of knowledge had been deeply steeped in an identity development process.

This section will explore the concept of soul and spirit as a form of resistance to the dominant canon. Some scholars regard this as a form of *gynosophical* resistance. Our ancestors live inside and amongst us. Spirituality in teaching is more than the replication of canned responses, fostering community or enhancing the learning of a student. It is an encompassing concept that ties in the "whole".

Instead of the third space or state of hybridity as found in post-colonial literature (Anzaldua, Bhabha, Fanon), the fourth space further legitimates the unique and distinct identity of indigenous/Native American teachers that goes beyond identity politics (Grande, 2004). "For hooks, it is not enough that we open our minds; it is also important that we open our hearts," (p. 35). George Yancy (2009) provides a poignant essay in his chapter, "Engaging Whiteness and the Practice of Freedom", found in the text: Critical Perspectives on bell hooks. Yancy himself is a critical scholar in whiteness studies and philosophy in higher education.

The significance of his work reinforces the notion that bell hooks is staunch proponent for our classrooms to include the heart and arguably a sense of spirit to be

considered not simply important, but necessary. Yancy connects her pedagogy to an important concept: freedom. He argues that white students will benefit from a pedagogy that engages not only their minds and intellect but also their hearts. While a clear benefit for all students, his point aims to expose the educational system that privileges skin color and relegates cultures outside the dominant canon to those of less than or "superstitious." His words on the matter:

> According to hooks, the world outside and the inside walls of the academy constitute a continuum. Also, the so-called private, interior world of the self is always ready in the world. While it is important for hooks that practices of freedom take place within the context of the classroom, spaces that often teach conformity, such practices must extend beyond the classroom. Healers, in this case both teachers/professors and students, are not navel gazers, but committed to social praxis. In short, we must act and reflect "upon the world in order to change it" (p. 38).

Paula Gunn Allen wrote a compelling text which counteracted years of patriarchy and put the feminine of Native American Studies to the forefront: The Sacred Hoop (1992). Her book was critically acclaimed by many and criticized by others for reinforcing stereotypes. Regardless, her book and life's work includes many valuable stories to combat the overarching destruction of racism and patriarchy has had on indigenous ways of life in the Americas. In particular, this information from her text validates my own tribal beliefs:

> When we shift our attention from the male, the transitory, to the female, the enduring, we realize that the Indians are not doomed to extinction but rather are

> fated to endure. What a redemptive, empowering realization that is! As the Cheyenne long have insisted, no people are broken until the heart of its women is on the ground. Then they are broken. Then they will die. The plot that we all know doesn't exist has been contrived to convince Indians and everyone else that Indians are doomed to extinction, to throw to the ground every woman's heart. It has been carried out by the simple process of subjecting our cultures, lives, traditions, rituals, philosophies, and customs to Christian patriarchal scrutiny, seeing only the male in them, putting male bias into systems that never had it, interpreting rituals, customs, philosophies, and attitudes in male-biased terms, and generally creating out of whole cloth, the present male-dominating view about the tribes and their significance (pp. 267-268).

Allen demands that American Indian literatures and societies no longer be analyzed by inappropriate lenses that obscure the female influences and in her words the "gyno-cratic" nature of tribal societies. The legacy of colonialism and oppression does not always lend itself to egalitarian or pro-woman situations though. My role as a Northern Cheyenne woman in education, is more than just my legal or political status. The added layer of gender identity is another perspective that I bring to my work, my classroom, and community involvement. I think back to the young Pawnee girl that became my great-great grandfather's wife. Pawnee Woman as they called her. Her tenacity and resiliency flows through my veins. Yet, I cannot stop at one stage or another

My entire career has been spent deciphering and creating my identity within higher education. Cook-Lynn (1996) discussed the role of American Indian Women in Higher Education through which I connected my motivation to pursue this research.

> What a modern Indian woman in the 1990's is doing is very likely dependent upon what her female ancestors and relatives have done. She walks the road smoothed for her by the women who preceded her. She does not, contrary to public opinion, operate in a vacuum, and she is not without precursors. Today's native women often do not claim as their heroines those women whose virtues have been extolled by whites. Sacagawea, for example, who led Lewis and Clark across the mountains, whose statue often stands in the rose gardens of museums and universities, is not universally seen by contemporary Indian women as a figure to be emulated (p. 99-100).

The depth of my lived experiences, information gathering, and theoretical influences has shaped my identity over the years. My cultural background has been tied to my academic training, and as a result I have aligned with certain theoretical paradigms like feminism, anti-racism, and other multicultural theories.

Episode One: A Closer Look at Self

Several years ago, I was fortunate to be involved in a self-study with an incredible mentor, Dr. Gayle A. Buck. She was my research and professional mentor. I undertook a research seminar with her, and the focus was an action research project. The semester long project was intense, and came to know my "self" better than ever before. As I look back at the extreme identity crisis that I went through, I am lucky to have survived somewhat unscathed and still in contact with my former mentor. It was a tumultuous time of growth. I do not intend to sound overly penitent for this experience, but it serves as a reminder how education comes through many forms. Even terribly painful experiences provide insights into the capability of educators to persevere. Self-study is

an eye-opening experience for many educators. As Zeichner (1999) explains self-study, it should not be considered as invaluable.

> Contrary to the frequent image of the writings of teacher educators in the wider educational research community as shallow, under-theorized, self-promotional, and inconsequential, much of this work has provided a deep and critical look at practices and structures in teacher education, (p. 11).

My own venture into self-study gave me a profound look upon myself that guided my teaching practices. The lesson that became priceless was the emotional and spiritual lessons about who I was and fulfilling my soul's calling. This is what I consider the pedagogy of re-birth.

I felt so vulnerable.

What am I doing? My struggle to be heard and understand myself as an educator was documented in my early days as a teaching assistant. My journals were filled with pleadings to acknowledge the educator as a person in this process. My attempts to deny part of my identity or suppress it in my teaching became futile.

My betrayal

> My years of training and socialization in the discipline left me with little solace. The very theories, philosophies and cultural knowledge felt miles away. Yet, within this "after place" it propelled me into the unknown territory of pulling back fears to seek new understanding about the various positions I held. Feelings of betrayal and abandonment overwhelmed me and practically consumed for a period of time in my teaching.

> The theories that I held onto dearly were of little comfort. As my theories were enacted by the actual practice of teaching it disrupted my entire being. This sense of betrayal manifested into fear, doubt, anguish, and bewilderment. At the time, the strong emotions invoked by this process felt like I was about to jump off of a cliff. Yet, the benefit of this experience was the actual awakening it led to about my instruction. Any naïve notions about the practice of teaching were undone and I was forced to redevelop myself.

I was in emotional distress. The question that comes to mind now as I reflect: What was I doing?

> I finally brought myself to read the article that Gayle, Julie, Margaret and I published a couple of years back. It is one thing to have the memories of events, but to also see a written record is another. My reading brought a resurrection to all of those memories. "this is vulnerable stuff!": Four words that were not terribly sagacious.

In her 2009 article, Gayle Buck explicitly describes the process of mentoring students in doctoral programs. Buck's reflections show the depth and state of being that I existed in during that fateful semester.

> It was during that eighth meeting that I was forced to confront my own views of authority in teaching the teacher and how those views were negatively affecting this mentoring relationship. As I once again tried to coax the graduate teaching assistant out of the silence to which she had retreated, she and the second graduate student very quickly turned the tables on me. In the transcripts, the graduate teaching assistant began 'It's ironic how this group duplicates exactly what my

> little group is trying to fight against [authority in teaching]… that's why I am so anxious you to see weaknesses.' The second graduate student responded: 'Now we are exposing our little skeletons.' The graduate teaching assistant continued, 'Let's be honest,' and went on to describe how I, and others like me, demonstrate authority through talk by using names and citing studies many times during conversation in order to demonstrate authoritative knowledge. In a later transcript she elaborated:
>
> Don't you get what I'm saying? This is vulnerable stuff. I understand you have to have a research literature to understand what it is, but there are certain instances where you might draw something out and someone might not want to hear about a name. They don't want to hear about that. They just want to be heard… I want there to be realness to it and stop hiding behind all those theories, (p. 514)..

As I struggled through an extremely vulnerable stage as an educator, I can better recognize the growth patterns and pains (as it was).

Disillusionment

My course adviser and mentor initially introduced me to the concept of disillusionment with teaching. I wrestled with the concept for several days and developed a couple of journal responses. First, my working definition of this term implied that that I had a romantic view of what teaching was going to be or "look like". My perspective to teaching was founded upon philosophical principles, critical theories and other social theoretical influences. The fact that I had little experience with teaching at the college level does not mean that I had some

> fantastic vision on the experience. Rather, my strength with the theoretical issues in education provided me with a solid foundation.

From the beginning of my instructional experience, I felt isolated in the classroom because of the convergence from theory into practice. Together those experiences translated into a disillusioned experience, but the eruption of feelings of vulnerability were the profound lessons. My isolation in the classroom does not place me in a special status. Quite contrary, several scholars have developed essays around the issue of isolation or disillusionment with teaching. 'Academic Pursuit' represents the academy's values- this was my first realization. But now I am realizing in many ways those are also my values (MacGillivray, p. 470).

Additionally, often times the word disillusionment puts full responsibility onto the target in the situation. Back then, I had little opportunity to research exactly what this term means for me as an educator. My grip on foundational knowledge was loosed, and I hesitated to accept such a label of analysis. It just "felt" uncomfortable. Throughout the entire self-study project experience, I held fear about sharing concerns with the faculty and peer involved with the project. Others have captured the sense of *vulnerability* that these projects invoke upon educators. Buck captures that "fear" and the crucial role that mentors have in teaching:

> After this confrontation of my understanding of authority, my journal entries quickly became focused on her vulnerability in educational experience and the role I played in making her feel vulnerable. I realized that as she felt she was stumbling because she was 'betrayed by theories' (a quote she used frequently),

> and I, the one who expected her to understand those theories, was watching (p. 514).

As I stated, this entire project shed light on the incredible benefit for faculty and graduate students to transcend disagreement, and delve into matters like vulnerability. It begs the question: what if I would have quit or gave up? Had I as the fledgling teaching assistant just surrendered to the overwhelming and very real feelings of vulnerability I would not have learned the valuable lesson of transcendence. Buck's statement offers validation and confirmation to me:

> Although not explicitly stated, the data analysis showed that, in the beginning, we sought to have her connect to our theories and connect to students in the same way that we did. As time went on, we realized that she did critically examine theoretical approaches presented in our graduate courses, explored intellectually and practically new theories to which she could connect, and ultimately emerged with a new, yet nascent, theoretical understanding of what it means to be Northern Cheyenne and connect to students as she with/in diversity (p. 515).

For the purposes of this dissertation project, I had to go back re-read and re-search those old journals and artifacts from my classroom. The texts that I utilized in my courses were prolific in education. As I re-read my journals on my student's reactions to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I re-lived the pedagogical challenges I had with getting my students to connect to the material. I made a deliberate note about the student's reaction: "Is this book even about education?" (2-18-05 journal). I suppose that question is a little humorous, but it is certainly not shocking. This particular segment in my course taught

me a valuable lesson as an educator: what is blocking the students from connecting to the text? This is an expanded view of my journal:

> The class seems to be struggling with the Paulo Freire book… I made the choice to do some instruction about the book to address content issues. It came to my attention that some of the students did not know what pedagogy was. This is where I spent most of the class discussing the model [Freire oppressor/oppressed]. What is pedagogy? What is praxis? A # of students were asking me questions, so I was deliberately trying to pose those questions back to class. (As an attempt to not be too dominant in class).

This was an opportunity to engage my students so that they did not become lost in the literature or the technical jargon[10].

One particular comment that I wrote about came from my teaching evaluation after the fact. Since the class evaluations are confidential, I am unaware of "who" made this comment. But for me, it was from a student in my classroom that I somehow failed. In my multicultural education class, a student wrote about how "she [Colette] talks about Native Americans too much." Those are my paraphrased words, and as I re-examined those course documents, something struck me. I realized how delicate and critical those first years of teaching were for me. What would of become of me, if I had succumb to my critical teaching evaluations, or had given up in my self-study project? Another student wrote a rather lengthy essay of complaint about the manner in which I dressed. In their opinion, I was too big for the way I dressed. I remember talking to a couple of

[10] In an old journal from my Teacher as Scholar course with Dr. Buck, I wrote down her sage advice: "no one sent you the wrong kids." It is my job to teach 100% of the students. (January 25, 2005).

fellow instructors about those experiences. But, what I remember most was the flurry of emotional responses that those evaluations brought back to me.

Do not misunderstand what I am writing, I do not wish that course evaluations be omitted or done away with. It was the personal attacks within the evaluations that penetrated my world. Perhaps, it would have been much more comfortable to take the easy road and not push my students or challenge their thinking. I could have easily assimilated into the dominant culture or majority racial culture and blended in with the others. Finally, the key question is what is it that sustained me through these difficult times? My childhood was marked with challenges, my undergraduate college career brought a host of crises and confrontations with past hurts, and my official entry into the professional world as an educator was greeted with negative criticism. What kept me afloat? I can go back and assert that it was the spirit of who I was. The very essence that cannot always be seen but it can be felt- my soul. Of course I have been fortunate to have wonderful friends, faculty, supervisors, and others that have helped me along the way. However, as many educators and others in the human services fields know, you cannot make somebody do anything that are unable or will not do. Ultimately, I had to reach within myself and push forward to re-define myself on my own terms.

Episode Two: Productive Disturbances

Due to unfortunate and rather extreme circumstances in my classroom, I adopted very authoritarian values and practices. For example, I had a verbal altercation in my class that required upper level administration notification. Four student-athletes in my classroom brought a fight from the dormitory into my classroom that almost resulted in a physical fight. This was a different experience for me, and certainly not something I

expected in my college classroom. The shock of this incident forced me to examine my syllabus, my stance on disciplinary action, and critically examine the place of experience in my classroom. The unexpected and blatant disturbance in my classroom caused me to assume unnatural traits.

The irony of my new form was that I did not necessarily feel comfortable or "like" this style of teaching. Something changed inside of me after going through that experience. A new defense mechanism started after that day. My classroom through which I always found solace had become a "combat zone". My old notions of a democratic classroom gave away to the totalitarianism of a restricted environment. A part of my "live" classroom died as I reacted to the introduction of violence into its hallowed ground. I struggled to re-build a sense of normalcy in my classroom and amongst my students. The hope for growth did not wither away, however. Dewey (1934) offers a different perspective to me. "For only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living. And when the participation comes after a phase of disruption and conflict, it bears within itself the germs of a consumption akin to the esthetic", (p. 14). Even in light of the powerful disturbance for my teaching, students, and classroom, I could not deny its existence or its powerful grip. The confrontation with this ordeal reveals the interdependence between me and the students.

Episode Three: Confronting those outside the norm

Literacy is not the norm

My first experiences with my student, whom wrote at an 8th grade level were very bothersome and opened my eyes to the reality of their learning needs. I could not take for

granted that everybody in my classroom knew how to complete assignments (to my "standards") or answer my quiz questions in academic/scholarly responses. Being familiar with sociology of education theorists and philosophers like Pierre Bourdieu, (1989), I had to seriously evaluate my assumptions about the "social and cultural capital" I expected him to bring to my classroom. I replicated the "universal" expectation and acted as an agent toward my college student:

> Official nomination, that is, the act whereby someone is granted a title, a socially recognized qualification, is one of the most typical expressions of that monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence which belongs to the state or to its representatives. A credential such as a high school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets. As an official definition of an official identity, it frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective, (pp. 21-22).

My commitment and concern for this student compelled me to reach out to this particular student. I could not impose the standard onto him, which would perpetuate a system that oppresses many of the students in my classroom. It was my moral responsibility to at least attempt to provide him with additional support services to assist him with his course and ultimately college goals. Most importantly, I had to see him outside of the societal constraints or expectations that I had set up for him in my mind. If I were to truly "help" him, I had to "see" him in a different with more thoughtful intent.

The following excerpt from a reflective journal show how profound this experience was for me about the academic needs of this student- and my role as his teacher:

> The quiz in my course was posted online through Blackboard, which required that I grade the short answer portion of the assessment. I opened the responses for each student to determine the final grade for the assignment. The quiz response by one of my students was very disturbing, which caused me a state of awe. His reply was written as though an 8th grader or possibly younger completed the quiz. In addition, "instant messaging" language was intertwined with standard language throughout the answer. For example, the letter "u" replaced "you" in the text. My initial reactions were of complete disbelief. I was not aware of any accommodations at the time for this student, and I questioned if it was a "joke" or prank on the part of this student. In other words, my mind could not fathom that a college student could write at that level on a quiz. A flood of emotions came over me as I tried to understand his and my own dilemma with the information. The quiz became much more than an assessment tool to calculate a grade. It became an opportunity, a quandary and a call to action. It forced me to recognize the complexity of this issue through the words of my own student. I met this problem or issue in higher education in frontal fashion that stirred my consciousness. I was faced with a difficult scenario which made me feel upset for the student, yet struggle to resist any unfair judgment. Yet, I knew that I had to ensure that this was addressed for his sake.

This experience forced me to examine my own assumptions about the preparation that my students had upon entering college. I do not intend to act like I am naïve or ignorant about my students; rather this serious issue forced me to confront my own privileged position as an instructor. I had certain expectations of the skill sets that my students should bring into college. This confrontation with the reality of my students challenged my thinking and pedagogical practices. I felt a rush of emotions after this incident. It angered me, saddened me, and caused me to question my assumptions about preparation. Although tempting, I could not promote a "blame-game" about who failed him, my work was to educate, assist and reach out to my student. This situation afforded me the opportunity to resist the trap of binary thinking, and look below the surface level.

As an undergraduate I qualified for the services that the SSS Program provides to students. My position became a conduit for me to be there for the students in a meaningful and productive way. Since I could identify with many of the experiences that my students faced like academic preparedness, financial struggles and various other social problems, I strived to provide an interconnected classroom. My background as an American Indian woman with multi-racial children and a staunch community advocate did not entirely prepare me for the broad range of diversity in my new position. bell hooks (1994) in *Teaching to Transgress*, endorses an alternative notion about teaching in diverse classrooms that resonates with my own work. Although I a member of a disenfranchised group, it does not qualify me as an automatic "diversity" expert.

> It is difficult for many educators in the United States to conceptualize how the classroom will look when they are confronted with the demographics which indicate that "whiteness" may cease to be the norm ethnicity in the classroom

> settings on all levels. Hence, educators are poorly prepared when we actually confront diversity. This is why so many of us stubbornly cling to old patterns. As I worked to create teaching strategies that would make a space for multicultural learning, I found it necessary to recognize what I have called in other writing on pedagogy different "cultural codes," (p. 41).

It wasn't the fact that my student was writing in *instant messaging* talk or slang, it bothered me that he was unaware of institutional norms and expectations for writing. I could no longer presume that all of my students were aware collegiate norms and mores. Thus, it challenged me as an educator to not judge my student, but change my pedagogical approach. As hooks further identifies, "To teach effectively a diverse student body, I have to learn these codes. And so do students. This act alone transforms the classroom," (p.41). This particular episode reminded me that I cannot give directions without understanding the prior knowledge that my students brought with me into the classroom.

Further, hooks acknowledges that the convergence between theory and practice is. Through her teaching of critical pedagogy with students, a degree of "pain" is witnessed in the classroom.

> And I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain. And I include recognition of it now when I teach, that is to say, I teach about shifting paradigms and talk about the discomfort it can cause, (p. 43).

I was extremely vigilant about "making it" as Colette, the scholar or educator, and not because of my racial/political background or gender. My early experiences in my current position were full of opportunities to challenge assumptions. The following passage from bell hooks (1994) struck me because of my similarities in my own classroom to hers. Initially, I felt discombobulated, frustrated, and terrified to re-create an oppressive atmosphere in my classroom.

> When In entered my first classroom as a college professor and a feminist, I was deeply afraid of using authority in a way that would perpetuate class elitism and other forms of domination. Fearful that I might abuse power, I falsely pretended that no power difference existed between students and me. That was a mistake. Yet it was only as I began to interrogate my fear of 'power' – the way that fear was related to my own class background where I had so often seen those with class power coerce, abuse and dominate those without—that I began to understand that power was not itself negative. It depended what one did with it. It was up to me to create ways within my professional power constructively, precisely because I was teaching in institutional structures that affirm it is fine to use power to reinforce and maintain coercive hierarchies, (pp. 187-188).

This passage provided me with a very important realization. Although I work toward helping my students overcome disadvantages or barriers, I was in a position of authority. I did not have to avoid my position of authority or "power" as hooks describes it. There were temptations about "not being too hard" on a student and hold back candid yet respectful advice. I did not want to perpetuate the harshness of bureaucracy, but I came to realize that I trivialized the complexity of issues. Yet again, the allure of over-

simplification and avoidance were ever present. Like hooks, I "respect pain" and the education that the emotion of fear gave to me is priceless.

Episode Four: Diversity

"Irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group's collective psyche and values than do years of research." ~ Vine Deloria, Jr.

Unfortunately, other students grapple with emotional problems that are dismissed or trivialized at times. What happens when I am faced with a classroom situation that quite literally forced me to "walk the talk" in terms of diversity. I would confront and re-visit some of my own views and learn an incredible lesson from my student. The role between teacher and student was turned around, and remains one of the weightiest experiences in my teaching career.

Adam

One particular incident that involves a question that one of my students posed in a former class. Adam[11] is a very intelligent and multi-talented transfer student. He was a diligent student that was an active participant in class. He maintained a positive attitude and took an active leadership role. Mid-way through our semester, we entered into the segment on "diversity" on college campuses. Diversity is an enormous concept to describe cultural, racial/ethnic, religious, sexual identity, physical appearances and a host of other topics in human differences. The textbook for my course has a much narrower focus on cultural, racial/ethnic differences and prejudices. It is my responsibility to acquire other references or sources to provide a broader understanding than what can be covered in a class text. Dually noted, this broad ideology cannot be adequately covered within the small amount of time allotted in the semester. Thus, the majority of the focus for discussion was on race/cultural, sexual identity, religious and regional differences.

Questions can illuminate the power of thinking in a classroom. My course relied heavily on a discussion format. Students were expected to be active participants in the weekly topics and were encouraged to be very open and share ideas mutually. One particular student stunned me on the diversity conversation. Essentially, he threw me a curve ball that in its fleeting moment illuminated the reality of lived out theory into practice. He caught me off guard with a very pointed question about race relations. The class had got on to a subject about inter-group relations and he asked me a blunt question: "Miss Colette, what do Native Americans think of Black people?" His fearless

[11] Name changed to protect anonymity and integrity of students and programs.

questioning in front of peers and to his instructor was of genuine curiosity instead of malice or mockery.

His question left me with feelings of unpreparedness and a great degree of discomfort. The sheer irony alone of being asked to speak on behalf of my people from my student provided me with an incredible experience to "live-out" my pedagogical approaches and my philosophical views. Further, this particular moment was slightly different in that I felt as though I had already been here. A sort of educational arrogance flashed in my mind, "you mean you can't tell?" I devoted my entire career to end oppression and challenge the thinking of my students. This was one of those moments that you wish you could stop time and ask for an extra century to answer the question. The question itself begged for a complex answer. I did not perceive it as a negative question, so the "crawl in a hole and waste away" expression was not relevant. Rather, his question was one that startled me because of its openness and candor. It also uncovered a layer of trust within the classroom. Much to my surprise, I had actually accomplished some rapport and respect in the classroom. This experience caused me discomfort, yet it manifested of the lived-out experiences in a democratic classroom in which students have a critical voice.

After class, I asked Adam to join me in a walk back to my building so that we could further discuss the matter. I felt obligated to ensure that Adam full understood my academic rhetoric and most importantly, knew my personal position on the matter as well. It was critical that I discuss other information with him that shed light on the provocative question. I quickly recognized and understood that he was very comfortable

in my classroom. I wanted to afford Adam his time to ask and put my selfish needs aside. In other words, let his voice be heard.

Playing Indian

Years back, I served as the advisor for the Native American student group on my campus. Sadly, several Anglo students were guilty of "playing Indian" at the Nebraska vs. Oklahoma football game. The "excuses" given to justify and rationalize the behavior were numerous. "People don't know a lot about Native American culture." In the end, only to justify racist costumes by students who didn't mean any harm. "You can buy 'them' [Indian costumes] at stores, so it must be ok." (Apparently, the corporations have a vested interest in maintaining racial equality and solidarity.) This was a tumultuous time for me. My father had passed away earlier in the year, just slightly after the birth of my youngest son. I recognize now that I was not in the best "emotional state", but I was totally unprepared for the maelstrom of emotions that this act of racism would cause in my life. Again, I had to reach down deep inside of me to muster the courage and endurance to advise my students on this matter. The levels of institutional racism were revealed by the action of students.

The blog comments made on the student newspaper website left me puzzled and disturbed. Overt racism was being hidden and disguised with comments like: "what's the big deal?" Despite the intentions by anybody, I was very much insulted by the levels of racism and flippant responses going on around me. In a tiny way, I felt like the "old-timer" that wanted to start a demonstration or boycott campaign. The "radical" of the group watching from the periphery, and I took an extremely engaged approach to guide my student advisees through this incident. It was more than just being the advisor

to a student organization. I was a Northern Cheyenne educator, and in honor of my great-great grandfather's sacrifice to save his people, I could not sit idly by and allow such blatant racism and disrespect to prevail on my campus. This campus that was so foreign to me years back had become an integral part of who I was. It was my obligation to defend the dignity of tribal peoples, and educate those who were ignorant to tribal cultures.

Although I grappled with perceived threats and the realities of my profession, my position toward education and its value holds firm. The processes of greater self-understandings have enabled me to bring clarity and focus to my growth as an educator. Encountering these previously unknown places harboring personal fears has been transformative. Anger doesn't always seem compatible with concepts like transformative, beneficial, or necessary.

The eruption of disenfranchisement I experienced marked a critical part of my journey as a Native American educator. The ability to just shrug things off has never been my strongest skill. I was an older and somewhat wiser professional, and that event did not have to drive me out of the job that I loved. While full of frustrations and challenges, I did not shy away from voicing my concerns or calling out injustices. Regardless of the lack of knowledge that my colleagues, superiors or others had about my culture, I was going to stand up to the comments that tried to trivialize it. I distinctly remember a young student in a student government leadership position compare an Indian headdress to a pink Nike sweatshirt. He was attempting to draw an analogy (poor one) about the highly divisive issue. Other comments on the newspaper website were down right hateful toward Native Americans. Yet still, I did not back down from

spreading the awareness of my culture. Granted I was in a vulnerable position as the ONLY Native American woman in my department and division. But you see I had finally overcome that vulnerability and disillusionment that plagued me in my early days of teaching at the university. I found my voice, and I was going to forever use it.

You have to learn to walk in two worlds.

[The moccasins my Mom had made for me to honor my professional life.]

Chapter Six

(In)COMPLETION

Me: Mom, I am used to people trying to figure "what I am?"

Mom: Well Colette, you're a Cheyenne that comes first. When I was little my mother (Alice)

used to tell me, "you will have to walk in two worlds now.

But, you never forget that you're an Indian."

Years later, I looked back at those "words of truth" that my parents gave to me. My Mom wanted me to walk in both worlds, and my Dad wanted me to remember that blood is thicker than water. The tragedies that I dealt with as a bi-racial child in the midst of family abuse and community strife do not outweigh their sage teachings or the other familial lessons on life. More importantly, it is the deeply ingrained belief in hope that galvanized my tenacity, survival, resiliency and fortitude. Where am I today as a Northern Cheyenne educator? I have arrived at a place where I learned to utilize my instincts, life experiences, and heartaches as a way to contribute back to the world. My path as an educator is influenced by my stories, and I dedicate my career to overcoming some of the social issues that I endured.

Chapter Six provides a brief overview of the findings from this narrative inquiry. Further, Chapter Six re-examines additional classroom experiences of my teaching for "evidence" or rather the embodiment of soul. Finally, this final stage of this project will be to further understand the consequences to the omission of various layers within stories and experiences and stories. A whole person must confront their past, in order to inform the future. The past can be a very crippling specter in our minds and closets, but it does

not have to be. It can inform our modern lives so that healing can be realized. A classic American Indian novel, Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko (1977) tells the story of an Indian war veteran. Tayo, the protagonist of the book returns to his reservation to encounter a lot of stress and difficulty in his re-adjustment to his homeland. The cultural clash in this novel between Native and white culture is done through a brilliant writing style by Silko. The novel does not follow a traditional fiction format, in the sense of linear and in temporal order. The novel is written in-between places in time and memory of not only Tayo, its lead character, but also his ancient tribal traditions. The compelling quote from this book which remains with me since the first time I read it:

> *I'll tell you something about stories. They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have the stories." ~ Leslie Marmon Silko, (1977).*

Stories of my people, my family and my self are all that I have at times. I share them in order to bring about a cathartic effect and release for my own work. The use of classroom experiences provides a window into the notion that soul does not have to be placed outside of education. Further, if teaching is soul (or act of) and soul is indeed a part of my identity, then teaching is my identity. It challenges the notion of "am I born to do this?" All too often, decisions about careers or life goals can be made with little or no attention made to one's "identity." Financial rewards (while realistic and nice) can become the driving force behind a career decision. To follow one's path in life will not be easy, and to omit one's soul a tragedy.

Next, contributions to Native American hermeneutics and ethics in education, in general, will be discussed. Third, the notion of soul in education (furthermore spirituality) will be endorsed and recommended to address concerns for holistic education.

While not a radical notion, teaching is often described by educators as being at the heart of "who" they are in life – not just what they do. In her text, Teaching as Community, bell hooks captures it best: "We can't begin to talk about spirituality in education until we talk about what it means to have a life in the spirit. So we are not just teachers when we enter our classrooms, but are teachers in every moment of our lives," (p. 158). What were the mainstays to keep me going throughout the years? How does this affect my "transcendence in teaching?"

Métissage Three: Pedagogy of Transcendence

I strive to embody fairness, equity and social justice in my college classroom. The willingness to take on such an endeavor is difficult but not unbearable. It is founded in the worldview that the belief that a person never gives up. There were several points in life when it easily could have ended. Perhaps it would have been in vain I could have died, (as it almost transpired) when I was 19 years old. I came close to death as I struggled to get over significant brain injuries. Or another time, after a miscarriage of an ectopic pregnancy that caused me to severely hemorrhage when I was 23 years old. In that sense, I have faced death and it is indeed a scary place to be. Yet still, the will to overcome and endure reigns supreme. My mother reinforced the traditional Cheyenne belief that one does not fear his or her death. I am paraphrasing her proverb:

Look your best every day. Get ready and comb your hair. Meet the day, and if that means death, then meet it. ~ Bernice (Yellowrobe) Mast

The ancient tribal belief to live life and thrive runs deep in my family. It is not in vain that I have shared my stories and autobiography with the audience. You see, I am carrying on the Cheyenne tradition of education. I am teaching in each task that I do. My mother instilled that mindfulness in me. It is within the heartaches in some of my stories that I can teach others. My tribal people have suffered but we have endured despite it all. The act of survival is within my bloodlines. The struggles that I have endured have led me to a place of transcendence. I come to this next phase or chapters in my life with experiences that have taught me priceless lessons.

Episode One: Teaching as Healing

The healing of one's soul is a remarkable feat to witness. I had a conversation with a good friend of mine about some of my stories. I shared with her that it was instilled in me at a young age that our stories are sacred. The stories that I have shared are offered in love and healing. The concept of love is important to school as soul. It is through love that healing can take place. The heartaches in some of my stories are shared to teach others. My heartache teaches others.

In her text, hooks (1994) describes a teacher as a healer through the philosophical work of Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnamese). "That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that 'the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed

toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people," (p. 15). My teaching will be directed by this humble virtue as I proceed with the next stage of my journey. I must remain aware to actively work to overcome any barriers and acknowledge the dangers of excluding parts of myself, not attending to the "whole student", or even worse, lose sight on the very essence that is my life force. Despite all of the expectations placed upon educators, the work of a teacher is to bring about healing.

Spiritual death

An educator as a healer might be unconventional to some, but it an accurate description for where my life story is at this point in time. I have shared stories about my near misses with death. Uncomfortable and tragic experiences that provided a deeper understanding and appreciation for life. Regardless, I am grateful for those experiences. A more significant lesson for me has been what I consider my "spiritual death." I came close to giving up and not pursuing my dreams to be an educator. I've testified to the fact that it would be easier to withdraw and take an easier approach. But, let me clarify what spiritual death was in my life story.

The awakening of that intrinsic part of my self that helped me overcome adversity was crucial to my growth and development. It was like my old self had to be buried in order for my identity to emerge. Like many pivotal moments in life, I faced my own vulnerability and fears as a first year teaching assistant. I thought I had followed the game plan to be successful. At that crossroads of theory into practice, old identity into new self, I made the choice to rise above my circumstances. There is some degree of transcendental factors that assisted me with that feat. Factors that cannot be quantified or

replicated. It is within that circumstance of life events that I find that human factor- or the essence of soul. My life story reveals how those intrinsic qualities emerge from life events that are steeped in metaphysical elements. The mystery of my overcoming barriers to give back to my communities as an educator is found within my soul.

"Afterplace"

The soul of a teacher can be lost in the extreme amount of pressures and deadlines to meet standards or other forms of mechanized and prescribed curricula. Teachers may not feel empowered or even certain of their fate in the field of education (broadly speaking). Needless to say, this should not hinder or limit the amount of soul in the classroom. Educators are encouraged to sustain a sense of community in classrooms. Yet, we do not empower our young teachers; and, veteran teachers are not provided the on-going facilitation to build and sustain communities.

The formation of a community in college classrooms is not a new idea. It has been at the center of many teaching philosophies and classroom strategies. There isn't a Methods Course, per se, that I was given to teach in my classroom. There are training sessions available to new teaching assistants that give best practice tips. The relevance of those tips were not going to cover the depth necessary to provide an open classroom community which was a "safe place" for my students to engage in meaningful dialogue. As Dewey advises in *My Pedagogic Creed*:

> I believe that the teacher's place and work in the school is to be interpreted from this same basis. The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the

> influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences, (p. 9).

As I alluded to earlier in the text, I cannot inhibit the learning of my students with contrived and shallow classroom experiences. A community must include differing opinions, alternative perspectives and challenging thoughts. However, a couple of questions arise to me: How does an educator promote a classroom community? Does the educator simply tell students to verbalize brilliant points about controversial topics? If only it was that simple. The task of cultivating and preserving a classroom community requires an incredible amount of diligence.

Two of my closest friends (Chandra and Virginia) and I completed a self-study with a phenomenal group of educators and mentors. The lead researchers on this study were my research mentor Gayle Buck and a highly-regarded professor of mine, Margaret Macintyre Latta. The project spanned several months and it was an extremely profound experience for me. It illuminated my bond with my fellow sisters in practice, and afforded me a voice to express my role as a Native American educator. A preview to my story that I referred to in the first chapter of my dissertation, and now I provide the bigger picture: the confrontation of my fears. Latta and Buck (2007) recorded my self-study narrative in the second intonation of their research article:

> Through this process I attend to my "inner dialogue" devoting time to issues of community, class, race and gender, and I attempt to take this dialogue to my students. After reading Brown's (2002) self-study, my feelings as a new teaching assistant are validated. I identify with the intersections of ethnicity, race, gender,

and culture, portrayed within the scenarios of Brown's classroom situations. I appreciate the sincere manner in which she tells her story. Teachers need to acknowledge that they cannot "divorce" themselves from the classroom, instructional style, or any other interactions within the institutions. But what does that entail? The intersections of my background, values, beliefs, and culture definitely influence or direct my words and actions within the classroom. My passionate commitments to social issues are revealed in all areas of my life. Issues such as race, gender and class have been very important to me as a teacher in a homogenous environment. But when my students are reading Delpit's (1995) *Other People's Children*, conversations about race and class do not come through in forthcoming ways. I am completely perplexed by this because I struggled to engage students in dialogue about these issues. There are "scenes" within the Delpit text that address race explicitly. Through small-group discussions I probe student responses to these scenes, trying to dig beneath surface levels. Some of the students hold back, hesitant and resistant to probing. I find myself repressing my thinking to put forth an accepting atmosphere. Why do I assume a more restrained, passive role in an effort to get students to engage in these discussions? The fast and easy response is that I value the opinions and thoughts of my students. When I push my own thinking further, I have to admit that I hold some fear about pushing some of these potential hot-button topics. Perhaps this fear comes from my position as a disenfranchised person in society. I find that issues of race, gender, culture, and class can stir up emotions that scare others and myself. This can erupt in conflict, and my very being as a Northern Cheyenne

> teacher-mother-activist-student is called into question. My years of training and socialization in the discipline leave me with little solace. The very theories, philosophies and cultural knowledge feel miles away. Within this "afterplace" I am propelled into unknown territory, pulling back fears to seek new understandings about the various positions I hold (p. 196-197).

The "afterplace" I was thrust into was uncomfortable, and it was almost as though the lights were shut off. My path was not illuminated by anything, and it required that I dig within myself and come out of it. As Latta and Buck (2007) summarize the power of the self-study and its effect on our group of critical educators as scholars, their words and research work not only captivate the social, professional and mental learning and re-learning, but it includes attention to the physical aspect. To give one's self in the classroom is not limited to the intellectual act of instruction alone.

> The intonations that the self-study group encounters suggest that our bodies are indeed the reflexive instruments of comprehension, confronting vulnerability, seeking accountability to self, negotiating theory as working notions, and experiencing the pull of possibilities, revealing the role of our bodies mindfully forming and informing self and other (p. 202).

A lesson that I had to understand from my early days in teaching, was that my entire being had to be in balance. The reminder that I had to attend my entire being: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves. I could not continue to compartmentalize who I was, and understand that understanding who I was would lead me to- who I was called to be. In my quest to build community in my classroom, inspire others to voice their

perspectives, or as I asked my students to be vulnerable- I had to realize something first. I had to face my own fears and walk on an uncomfortable path to re-birth who I was going to be as a Northern Cheyenne educator. It was about fostering a learning environment that held standards, but did not suppress voice (whether my own or that of students). This might be considered a latent feature of social justice discussions is to nurture and cultivate discussion skills for students. Dewey reveals this in *Experience and Education* (1938):

> When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities, (p. 59).

I must determine the impact of course objectives, classroom interactions and my expectations for students in a critical way. I strive to be that teacher as healer.

Soul as Social Justice

The attention to social issues in my classroom is critical and of the utmost importance. They (social issues) have been a part of my identity since my first day in the classroom. Before that, I was worked in community outreach at the Indian Center. Social issues were going to be with me. In my current position, these types of issues are even more essential because at any given time my classroom has a tremendous and wonderful amount of diversity that begs acknowledgement. My cohort style classroom brings different racial, cultural, socio-economic, religious, and possibly even disability differences. Such diversity demands my resistance to pulling back, reverting to distance, or reacting with aloofness in an attempt to maintain control. The dream to teach such

diversity is realized. How shall I promote commonality that still attends to the unique and varied experiences of my students? Like Dewey in *Experience and Education*, it is critical that I resist the temptation to construct and develop my classroom in a hasty manner or to maintain order.

> The school was not a group or community held together by participation in common activities. Consequently, the normal, proper conditions of control were lacking. Their absence was made up for, and to a considerable extent had to be made up for, by the direct intervention of the teacher, who, as the saying went 'kept order', (p.55).

A genuine approach to construct a classroom community is required in my program. Classroom activities like civic engagement topics are utilized to bring awareness to my students as to current domestic and global issues. I return to the legendary film, *To Sir With Love*. Mr. Thackeray, as played by Sidney Poitier, greeted a rude welcoming as a teacher at a tough East London neighborhood in the film's setting. This is a profound quote from this character:

> Who are you? Do you see YOU the way you want to be seen? Then you must see character in yourself, discipline in yourself, determination in yourself - to survive - with dignity, no matter how tough the world around you is. Is that who you are? If not, is that who you want to be? If so, come... let's go walk down a street and see what we can GET them to see, (1967).

I strive to educate my students and hopefully inspire them to become active learners and not be dictated by their socio-economic status or backgrounds. There are far too many

people to name that tried to motivate me to not settle. But, like many other young people, I had "things all figured out." In a scholarly sense, I may have learned to depend on those academic theories, facts and logic a little too much. Needless to say, I eventually figured out that I knew very little. In his text, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America,* Vine Deloria, Jr. discusses the issues that occur when you do not actually understand what is going on. You might think that you know, but you don't. I was guilty of this in my teaching (but not life- a joke).

> Humankind may indeed have a gift for thinking things up, creativity, imagination, and inventiveness, but human societies and the earth's ecosystems seem threatened by a human creativity and imagination that has literally and figuratively lost touch with the earth. My friend George Kaull came to believe late in life that science also had a share of the "problem" he used to ascribe to religion. If faith is "believing things you know ain't so," a good number of scientists are guilty… The problem with Western science (both rationalist and empiricist denominations) reminds me of what the great pitcher Satchel Page told a young player seeking advice. To paraphrase: "Remember, it's not what you don't know that gets you in trouble, it's what you know that just ain't so that causes problems" (p. 55).

Again and again, I return to the power of my life experiences that provided me with the most powerful education. It caused me to

Further, Dewey (1909) addresses the ethical responsibilities of schools, and ultimately the teachers within them. Students should not become "drones" or fall victim to the mistakes of adults. His advice resonates with me:

> It is an absolute impossibility to educate the child for any fixed station in life. So far as education is conducted unconsciously or consciously on this basis, it results in fitting the future citizen for no station in life, but makes him a drone, a hanger-on, or an actual retarding influence in the onward movement. Instead of caring for himself and for others, he becomes one who has himself to be cared for. Here, too, the ethical responsibility of the school on the social side must be interpreted in the broadest and freest spirit; it is equivalent to that training of that child which will give him such possession of himself that he may take charge of himself; may not only adapt himself to the changes that are going on, but have power to shape and direct them, (p. 11).

My classroom engages complicated social issues to afford my students a place to partake in intellectual discussions. While I do not push my social or political agendas on to my students, I want them to be aware of the many dimensions and perspectives that any given social problem, issue or topic may hold.

As Dewey in *Moral Principles in Education* (1909) states: "Training is pathological when stress is laid upon forming habits of positive service. Too often the teacher's concern with the moral life of pupils takes the form of alertness for failures to conform to school rules and routine," (p. 15). My classroom is not designed to control the students. In turn, I do not intend to imply that my classroom is a nihilistic

atmosphere. Meaningful connections between content and experiences can render positive outcomes and genuine learning experiences through the establishment of community in classrooms. There are important components in the development of a classroom community.

Our ancestors live inside and amongst us. Soul in my teaching is more than the replication of canned responses, fostering community or enhancing the learning of a student. It is an encompassing concept that ties in the "whole". In contrast to the Business Model that dominates education, *Leading with Soul* (2011) offers an alternative perspective to corporate America. "Stories take us to the world of spirit. That's hard to buy if you grew up worshipping at the altar of facts and logic," (p. 109). When I announce myself to my classroom for the first time, I share with them- "I am a storyteller."

> A crude joke amongst educators may be that those who teach are "not in it for the money." Sadly, the educational field does not garner high wages or an overwhelming boost in class status. While shameful, it is the reality for many teachers and faculty. This dire scenario begs the question: so why should I teach? Classrooms must be mined for deeper meanings or "treasures" if you will. The fortune of intrinsic or those intangible rewards that cannot be measured in terms of currency or wares. I want to actively study my teaching via self-study methods, reflective practice, assessment and thoughtful dialogue with fellow colleagues.

"To study is not to consume ideas, but to create and re-create them."

~ Paulo Freire

Episode Two: Fortitude

More recently I understand that as an educator it is important to avoid disconnection from or dominance over my students and our classroom. In many ways my practice has matured and I utilize a more sophisticated approach. Yet, without all of my struggles as an extremely vulnerable tenderfoot in curriculum and instruction, I must nurture and sustain community in my classroom. I had to realize that it is my responsibility to develop and sustain it (community). The embodiment of teaching to create and nurture a community in classroom cannot happen alone or without a lot of effort, reflection and sincerity. I could not rely on old notions of classroom community and had to move ahead in my thinking and conceptualization of that concept. A classroom should involve many things that assist learners in their development and should aim to provide meaningful educational experiences. Do all of these experiences need to be positive? Are all classroom interactions going to be comfortable? Realistically, classroom experiences are not going to always be cozy. As I reviewed some journals from my first semester teaching interpersonal skills in leadership course, I became aware of the differences in where my pedagogy and approach had evolved.

My value of focus in my teaching at this time is fortitude. How do I explain or define fortitude? The standard definition of fortitude is strength, courage, mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, and danger. An easy search to plug into

the Google search engine on the internet. But… How does fortitude apply to my teaching?

> Mental strength and capacity to endure some of the "repeat struggles." This does not mean that I don't love my job. At times, there are re-current issues that take a toll on me emotionally while teaching. It can get to me when students flagrantly act or behave in a disrespectful manner… Over the years, I have settled in to the fact that my preferred style of teaching "democratic, open, caring" is viewed as a weakness by some students. Some of my students bring serious issues with them to my program, and I cannot ignore that or on the other hand enable that. [February 9, 2012]

It is important to use not only my intellectual memory, but also my physical and emotional memories. The roads that I have already walked have prepared me for present-day moments in time. The fortitude of my character gives away to the falling into my being, my spirit and a reminder that I am doing what I am called to be. This perspective that I have gained only happened because of all of my prior experiences. I cannot give up because certain discussions or dialogues make me uncomfortable. It would go against who I profess to be as an educator.

For example, my classroom discussions on civil engagement with my ALEC 102 students should inform them about the democratic process in this country, but not tell them how to feel about it. In addition, I encourage my students to look at how different groups and populations in the United States have been treated in a democratic country. Finally, I challenge them to think about how the civil process works in other parts of the world. This is a global society of which internet access has shrunk down in size,

considerably. My generation of students that I teach have grown up completely engulfed in technology. Hardware, devices and "apps" do not necessarily encourage a "soulful" environment.

Dewey in *Experience and Education* (1938) outlined two major principles that must work cohesively together. "The two principles of continuity and interaction as criteria of the value of experience are so intimately connected that it is not easy to tell just what special educational problem to take up first," (p. 51).

My classroom is a community of learners that are encouraged to participate, engage and learn from one another. Before I can explore issues of social justice in higher education, I am going to discuss the importance of a classroom being a living community. John Dewey recognized that a classroom encompassed much more:

> We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference. And any environment is a chance environment so far as its educative influence is concerned unless it has been deliberately regulated with reference to its educative effect, (p. 23).

Episode Three: Growth in Soul

There will be classroom experiences that challenge beliefs, ideas and values. I posit that these uncomfortable classroom experiences do not have to divide or subtract from the learning process. Rather, they can add to the growth and learning of educators. An important point about classrooms that Dewey raised over a century ago remains relevant to the work in college classrooms. The growth and learning of students cannot

be left to chance or left to hopes and whims. My own experiences have taught me the value of growth and learning that can and does occur even in uncomfortable and tense situations. My identity growth as Native American woman has been inextricable to my relationship with education.

The progress of my students is a valuable marker for me. However, if I am using a broad concept like growth, how will I measure success? Is it for my own personal or the growth of my students? Should it be considered a choice? Dewey's (1916) discussion about growth in *Democracy and Education* assists me with opening my understanding of this concept. "Growth is not something done to them; it is something they do," (p.44). Dewey makes an incredible point about young people. He challenges the educator to understand that growth is a natural state and inevitable. It is not exclusively controlled by one or two factors rather it is going to happen whether or not. The measurement of growth can be recorded through physical data like inches or pounds. Yet, how do I as an educator measure the growth or learning of my students? Growth does not rest solely upon measurements. It is not about controlling the ways in which my students behave, react or take information in. It is unfair for me to expect my students to grow on my time. As Dewey stated, it is something that they do. The examination of growth must go further beyond a static or a "fixed standard" as Dewey states below in *Democracy and Education*:

> Our tendency to take immaturity as mere lack and growth as something which fills up the gap between the immature and the mature is due to regarding childhood comparatively, instead of intrinsically we treat it simply as a privation

> because we are measuring it by adulthood as a fixed standard. This fixes attention upon what the child has not, and will not have till he becomes a man, (p. 43).

The connections between content and experiences cannot sustain or automatically produce growth in my students. It is not about the implementation of an equation to arrive at a correct answer. The discussions, revelations and at times challenges in between are critical to facilitate growth. What would have become of me had my professors not given me a second chance? How would I have turned out if I chose to shy away from my own fears and retreat into nowhere? As Dewey shows us, growth is not always about measure. A reminder to adults that our definite of growth may not emulate what it entails to have soul in teaching. My entire process in this project has been about growth and re-growth. There is little room for singularity in education, it may prevent the cultural, social, moral and physical development of others. My own life story is a testament to how there are multiple ways to walk this journey called life.

Dewey (1934) discusses the growth of student in his/her education. He starts to identify distinguishing factors in experiences. He posits that continuity is critical to experience. One isolated experience cannot solely provide a rich education. Dewey describes the process of education as evolving or "growing". "Growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of continuity," (p. 36). Dewey's concept of growth is not finite by any means. This principle of continual growth relies on a future direction. Not all experiences are going to guarantee a positive one, and some can be quite mis-educative. Thus, continual growth in a negative direction such as the criminal Dewey describes is not education. As an educator, my responsibility does not stop at the experiences I

provide in my classroom. I am responsible for the facilitation of experiences so that an on-going relationship begins between me and students.

An understanding of the growth of my students requires further analysis into what growth does for the purposes of education. Dewey was very critical of classrooms being disconnected from the outside world, communities or homes of students. I follow his recommendation, and value outside connections to my classroom. The experiences that my students have outside of my classroom are not considered inappropriate. Again, I do not make the argument that any topic or issue should be brought into my classroom. There are certain measures of prudence to acknowledge (i.e. private matters). I do want my students to engage events, issues or causes outside of the course's subject matter. The objective behind this approach is to develop connections between course content like empathy and how that connects to lived leadership and growth. Growth in this instance requires that other sources of knowledge are utilized to arrive at meaningful classroom experiences. It is within my very being to want to make connections in and between my students, but also the subjects, places, people and information that we pursue. The essence of interpersonal skills is to relate to other humans.

Episode Four: Who's Right or Wrong?

Paulo Freire's approach to ethics provides an additional way to critically and thoughtfully analyze what democracy means for me an educator. While a widely recognized scholar, Freire's ideas and philosophy are not the "norm" and certainly do not speak for the dominant canon in education. This is exactly the reason that his writings and educational theories inform my practice. His work challenged me (and still does) to

not give up on my ideal of democracy and continue to advocate and fight for the rights of not only my people, but others as well.

In his book, *Pedagogy of Freedom (1998)*, he devoted the text to moving beyond the theory into practice debate to arrive at a place in which educators can actually live out the ethics they purport.

> I may not agree with a given pedagogical theory of this or that author, and, of course, I ought to make my students aware of the disagreement. But what I cannot do in my criticism is lie to them. The education of the teacher should be so ethically grounded that any gap between professional and ethical formation is to be deplored. We should devote ourselves humbly but perseveringly to our profession in all its aspects: scientific formation, ethical rectitude, respect for others, coherence, a capacity to live with and learn from what is different, and an ability to relate others without letting our ill-humor or our antipathy get in the way of our balanced judgment of the facts, (p. 24).

It may seem silly to suggest that educators (including myself) may not always align their professional values with their actions. While unfortunate, it is not. It is not absurd in this modern day of empirical data and "assessments" that educators are unable to embody their ethical stance in a classroom. The demands and pressures of teaching, sadly, do not always afford opportunities to explore issues in true democratic fashion. Freire refers to the pressure of the "ethics of the market" that do not always embody compassion, tolerance or justice. Yet, this does not mean that I stop trying or divide my personal and professional ethics. I am one, and they (ethics) are fused and interrelated.

The identity of teachers cannot be confined to an "either-or" or binary praxis. The interrogation of the complexities of teacher identity contributes to the knowledge base of education, through alternative concepts like soul. I was instructed to "walk in two worlds" as a youngster. As I have developed, I realize that my world is much more than two worlds. I continue to sojourn in and out of many cultural contexts. I am an outlander and have found that my soul is my place or respite, retreat and rejuvenation. The embodiment of soul within teacher narratives is important to share so that isolation and other detrimental experiences do not occur among educators in earlier stages of their craft (or quite possibly at any time). There is no need to continue to perpetuate a competitive system that does not create communities. A host of scholars warn against the dangers of teacher-isolation and compartmentalization in education. (cite)

Soul is the essence of identity; and the stories capture it. The weaving of experiences with the realization that it's your soul emerging into your consciousness. Finally, the spirituality of education is a source of inspiration, endurance, and the "fire" that burns bright for a lot of people. The "fire" is authentic to who I am, and will always be. Even if this means at great cost to not "fitting in" or being accepted into the "whitestream" academy. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* offers some form of conclusion for me.

> For many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story… Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and

> conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives. Importantly, story telling is also about humour and gossip and creativity. Stories tell of love and sexual encounters, of war and revenge. Their themes tell us about our cultures. Stories employ familiar characters and motifs which can reassure as well as challenge (p. 145).

My life stories are an offering to future educators, present teachers, and as an honor to my ancestors that sacrificed for my existence to day. Deeply ingrained within me, is the will to teach others.

In addition, Smith (1999) describes the importance of "cultural survival" to indigenous research.

> Celebrating survival is a particular sort of approach. While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity. The approach is reflected sometimes in story form, sometimes in popular music and sometimes as an event in which artists and story tellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life and diversity and connectedness. Events and accounts which focus on the positive are important not just because they speak to our survival, but because they celebrate our resistances at an ordinary human level and they affirm our identities as indigenous women and men (p. 145).

Dr. Tuhiwai Smith was a theoretical influence on me. One of those educational mentors via her texts and research approaches. At the time, she was an inspiration to me to want to make a difference in the academy. Now, she continues to mentor me as I move on to the next chapters in my life story. She and many, many others are the story tellers that keep indigenous thought, knowledge and pass on those "ways of knowing" to the next generation of scholars.

The endeavor to present an inquiry of my auto-narratives and life stories brought about a significant amount of challenges and growth. It shed even more light on what I considered soul to be in teaching. I gained a new sense of understanding for self, and it released a great amount of courage to bare my soul. While I have shared much heartache in my stories, I do not seek pity. I intend to teach others through my heartaches. The first theme I presented was to describe the degree of tenacity I hold within myself. My second theme was about an awakening and confrontation of self. The test of my soul as I entered that classroom for the first time. The intersections between the physical, social, mental and spiritual selves collided. Finally, my last theme reflects the state of knowing I am in at this point in life. I transcended many things to arrive at this point. The soul in my teaching has been the life force of who I am. Teaching is within my soul, and soul is inextricable to my identity. The search within myself to create this project revealed that my path to teaching may have been riddled with heartaches, but it is the ability to pull through and persevere that I wish to offer to the training of other educators. The advocacy for soul to be included in conversations about how to educate others. As my grandmother taught my mother, to lose one's soul is to die. The inclusion of soul to teaching will promote the whole person.

What have I learned?

The last métissage theme for this project I named- Pedagogy of Transcendence. As an educator, I do not consider myself at an ending to my life story. My life writing is emerging into a state of transcendence. There are four key lessons that this inquiry has taught me. I couch them in the value of humility. I do not consider my stories as the only way to arrive at an understanding. Rather, all of our stories can afford us the opportunity to grow and learn from one another. Yet, the sharing of stories offers a unique and important way to heal one another. There are four significant points that I would like to offer to inform other educators and practitioners:

- The indomitable and incredible tenacity of the human spirit. In what ways can we as educators use our stories to reflect and re-visit past experiences to inform our practice, grow our understanding and honor the human spirit?
- My story is offered as a way to help others arrive at a greater understanding. It is with sincerity and humility that I offer my narratives to others.
- There are many layers to identity. The various life experiences that teacher educators go through are meaningful and can be useful when carefully integrated into teaching experiences.
- Finally, our stories heal one another. The cathartic effect of searching our souls for strength, courage and hope can transcend our thinking into new

> ways of knowing, meaningful dialogues with others, and perhaps even provoke epiphanies or bring about visions of who are future selves can be.

In the footsteps of other indigenous scholars, theorists, and brilliant thinkers and with respect to our "ways of knowing" I pose the question quite deliberately- What have I learned?

> Indigenous metissage is location-based: My soul has been my tether to the world. It is my essence of humanity that I've returned to in order to rejuvenate, heal, re-group, and re-claim my sense of Self in order to continue on in my craft (life).

My suggestions to improve upon this work:

- Many more theorists and philosophers could be included.
- Expand on this project and include the life stories of other educators.
- Binary Existences: this project is ripe with ways to examine the binaries emergent in this work.

Our Life Stories continue on…

I stand before you all now, as somebody that belongs now. The multiple layers of identity have been re-configured and re-examined to arrive at a solid state of awareness. I employed four different strategies to analyze and re-story myself through this project: culture, inspiration, career and motherhood.

As a Cheyenne mother, I seek to encourage, inspire and assist not only my children but anybody else with my life story. Each of you matter, and our stories heal one another.

To find one's purpose in life, is a priceless treasure.

I end with the poignant and strong words of Gloria Anzaldua (2007):

I will not be shamed again,

Nor will I shame myself (p. 109).

[The baby moccasins of my youngest son, Mason.]

EPILOGUE

Through the process of writing my authentic dissertation, I went through massive waves of emotions as I peered back on my journals, old writing, and memories. Each time I sat down to write the epilogue, the waves of those emotions crashed upon my being. I cried so many tears of healing, joy and feelings that I cannot describe because I lack the poetic talent to capture them with words. In some ways, I have come "full circle" as the colloquial saying goes. As I birthed this project, it became an ending to many parts of my stories, but it re-generated many other practices that I had forgotten about. As I reviewed my optimistic poetry written as a fresh-faced young adult, it rejuvenated my creative side. Where was this creative energy going now? I stopped writing prose, poetry and dove into academic writing. Yet, I have retained that desire to write "outside the dominant canon" to express myself freely or re-produce who "Colette" is as opposed to what I have been told I was. A major lesson that my autobiographical writing taught me has been the authentic expression of self. Over my years in higher education, I straddled the balancing act between what is legitimate and acceptable to higher education, with my passionate desire to make a difference and share stories. This project was undoubtedly an expression of my self, but it culminated all of my experiences. I must re-visit the core text that guided my inquiry: *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times* (2009). "Thus written autobiography offers the textual production and reproduction of lived experience, particularly as commanding social forces such as race and gender shape that experience" (p.19). The pages I submit in this project were offered as an authentic production and in some cases

re-production of whom I am as a teacher. This project enabled me with the chance to let my authentic voice emerge via the heart and soul I pour into my teaching.

My stories are a protest to the onslaught of odds against me, the stereotypes of others or any inaccurate images from the dominant culture. And, it made all of those hard times seem more divine rather than happenstance. Confrontation of one's self is most certainly a challenge. While a challenge, it is worth it. As Boloz (2008) discusses in his book chapter, The educator's voice or "the club":

> Whereas some question auto-ethnography as a "myopic view of scholarship" and as "narcissist" and "in danger of gross self-indulgence," I was drawn to the methodology. In auto-ethnography the researcher uses personal experiences and highly personalized accounts in a culture to reflexively look more deeply at self-other interactions, turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography—looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur (pp. 191-192).

Boloz's research perspective legitimates work that utilizes auto-biographical, auto-ethnographical and self-reflective techniques to relate one's self to the larger context of society.

Instead of looking at my own work as just a smattering of stories, I offer it as a way to add to the educational conversations on teacher-identity, self-study, métissage, and cultural discussions. This inquiry endeavored to explore the philosophical concept of soul in education. Soul in my teaching has become a central and dominant in my work. My progression as an educator and scholar as educator continues on as I strive to stay on

the path of lifelong learning. Yet, a major focus of my educational research is the manner in which our stories (narratives) offer healing for one another. The unspoken emotional and spiritual side to education that remains unarticulated and vastly unexplored is very important to me. Surely, there are many, many scholars that do attend to the spiritual and emotional side to education (hooks, Nussbaum). Yet, a continuation of some of the themes I presented could better inform the manner in which teachers embody soul in education.

I've shared some tough stories in my narrative. I felt it necessary to give some closure or updates to the narratives of my parents. Despite our wicked troubles, my family and I did mend our relationships. Prior to his death, my father and I were able to re-forge a relationship as father and daughter. I do not have to carry around the guilt of what could have or should have been. As my life continues, I work to honor the legacy of my family, relatives, tribe and communities. The key to this, I did an intensive personal ceremony to forgive those in my past that hurt me or betrayed me. Those soul wounds that I carried with me became blockages to my physical, spiritual and emotional health. The process of re-visiting those stories, memories and the intense swells of emotions was cathartic for me. The process opened up my flow and gave me the ability to bypass any permanent damage like a surgeon that conducts a vascular by-pass procedure. My life writing has been the outlet for my passion, drive, fire, emotion and most importantly my soul as an educator. I offer the stories as a way to heal others. I am no longer ashamed of my life experiences. In many ways, my voice is no longer suppressed. If my story could help at least one other future educator or aspiring

professional in higher education, then that is a good thing. I seek to encourage and empower other educators to share their stories and life experiences.

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